

Copyright © 2020 Brandon Ross Reed

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

SURVIVING LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH:
FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT FOR THE LONG GAME

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
Brandon Ross Reed
December 2020

APPROVAL SHEET

SURVIVING LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH:
FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT FOR THE LONG GAME

Brandon Ross Reed

Read and Approved by:

Matthew D. Haste (Faculty Supervisor)

Kevin Peck

Date _____

To my beautiful wife and best friend, Kara, who always points me to the goodness and grace of God in the trenches of local church ministry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	2
Rationale	6
Purpose	8
Goals	8
Research Methodology	8
Definitions and Delimitations	11
Conclusion	12
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL MODEL FOR HEALTHY LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH	13
Biblical Importance of Running the Race of Leadership to Completion	13
Healthy Leadership as Seen in Hebrews	14
Healthy Leadership as Seen in Peter's Writing	20
Healthy Leadership as Seen in Paul's Letters	31
Challenges Unique to Leaders	44
Conclusion	49
3. PRACTICAL PLACES TO START IN SURVIVING LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH	50
Leaks in Leadership	54
The Leader in the Local Church Can Build This Life Out Practically	58

Chapter	Page
Soul Care and Spiritual Disciplines	64
Coaches, Counselors, and Spiritual Leaders	70
Boundaries in Calling and Character	77
Conclusion	86
4. FROM BURNOUT AND BROKENNESS TO THE BETTER WAY	89
Leadership Burnout	92
The Antidote to Burnout	96
Leadership Comparison and Pride	103
The Antidote to Pride and Comparison	109
Secret Sin	115
The Antidote to Secret Sin	120
Faithful	122
5. FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT	125
Thriving in Long Term Ministry	128
Reflection	133
Appendix	
1. INTERVIEWS	135
BIBLIOGRAPHY	143

PREFACE

This project in its entirety has not been an individual endeavor by any stretch of the imagination. Without the encouragement and grace of so many throughout the course of my doctoral program, I could not have completed this dream of earning a doctorate. I am confident that this is only possible by the goodness and grace of God, yet I want to say thank you.

First, I would like to thank my wife, Kara. Your relentless support of this dream of mine, and your encouragement through all of the travel, study, schooling, and writing have been invaluable. You never once complained, but rather persevered like Jesus through late nights and long weeks of work on my doctoral education, exemplifying your deep understanding of and commitment to Gospel work. A man who has a wife who believes in him and encourages him has a special blessing, and it is a blessing that I am undeserving of. Thank you for your selfless sacrifice. I love you so much and am eternally grateful for the sacrifices you have made in making this project and my doctorate possible. Your encouragement, leadership, and companionship make thriving in ministry both possible and fun.

Second, I want to thank our children, Addy (9) and Bauer (7). Mommy and I consider it a privilege and honor to raise you. You are tangible reminders of God's love for us. You two exemplify God's grace in our lives, and I am so proud of the leaders you are. You love like Jesus, serve like Jesus, and live in such a way that people see Jesus in your life. My time working on my doctorate was a sacrifice for you both. I cannot quite get my heart around how much I love you both. Life is full and our house is loud, but I would not change a thing!

Third, I want to thank my parents, Pete and Cindy. The gospel foundation you laid for Ben and I is a priceless gift of God's grace. I am thankful for how you led us in always looking to Jesus in all aspects of life, leadership, marriage, parenting, and ministry. To my brother, Ben, thank you for leading well as a pastor, and your constant encouragement to me in gospel ministry.

Fourth, I would like to thank our church who brings our family such joy by giving us the honor of me being your pastor. Our dear friends, Stephen and Mandy Catto, have made significant contributions to this project both to me personally as friends and partners in ministry, and to the details of this journey. Your encouragement and partnership in ministry are a blessing beyond words. Along with our church family, Mike and Trisha Juenemann, Scott and Mary Owens, Mark and Laura Brunson, and a myriad of other amazing leaders and humble followers of Jesus have been a well spring of joy and encouragement. Ron and Carol Sipus, thank you for your tedious work and editorial eye. And Jacob Wilson, it is such a delight to partner in ministry with you as a dear friend.

Finally, I want to thank the brothers who made this cohort enjoyable and memorable. Dan Dumas, thank you for sharing life and leadership with us. I am forever grateful for the leadership gold you taught us and the influence you have in my life. Connor Bales, Rashard Barnes, Blake Maxwell, and Michael Thompson, I thank God for blessing me with ministry partners, friends, and brothers like you. Dr. Matthew Haste, my supervisor, thank you for your great generosity in serving me and leading me throughout this process with my project. Dr. R. Albert Mohler, thank you for leading our great institution toward excellence in theological education.

Brandon Reed

Orange County, California

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am tired of it. I am also tired from it. These familiar phrases are more common in ministry now than ever before. For me personally, I am tired of hearing about pastors who have fallen because of a moral failure. The types of moral failure vary in range from abuse of substances to abuse of authority. Moral failures from sexual indiscretion seem to be prevalent and commonplace inside and outside the local church. But I'm not just tired of the moral failures that claim the ministries of talented and high-capacity leaders in the local church. I'm tired of hearing about pastors who took their own life, ending both their ministry and their life through suicide. My heart sinks hearing the news that yet another pastor has taken his life. Emotions well up inside of me every time I hear my own pastor, Rick Warren, tell the story of their son losing his lifelong battle with mental illness.

I've also interacted with dozens of pastors who tell me that they are tired from ministry. The grueling pace of ministry can at times create an unsustainable schedule of growing demands and needs. Demands and needs for counseling, communication, and creativity seem never to disappear in the life of a leader in a local church. The need for constant and consistent availability balanced with the need to communicate at a high level from the pulpit in a creative and captivating way can feel draining. Add in the desire from members and attenders of a local church that their pastor be available to do what they believe needs done from a spiritual leader, and the destination of burn out may begin to feel inevitable. I'm tired of it.

I still remember the sinking feeling on the drive home from the airport. I had just spent the week in Dallas at a Leadership Network retreat with the lead pastor of the

church where I was pastoring. I rode to the airport with our church's mission pastor and we threw our luggage into the bed of his well-weathered and somewhat vintage Ford Ranger pickup truck when my phone alerted me to a text message from the elders. They told me that there was something wrong with our lead pastor, and that I needed to pick up my car that I had left at the office and head home without coming inside. I watched as the lead pastor gleefully tossed his duffle bag into the backseat of his convertible Mustang to head toward home.

That drive from the Nashville Airport is forever etched into my memory as the drive that catapulted my thinking about how difficult it is to survive leadership at any level in the local church.

Context

Something has gone wrong. Terribly wrong. Maybe something has not gone wrong as much as something is currently wrong that has been previously wrong for decades. While I noticed that something was wrong for the decade of ministry I completed in the local church before the moral failure and fall of our lead pastor, it became personal when the proximity of ministry-ending issues hit my home church. However, moral failures are not the sole factor in a leader or pastor in the local church who does not make it to the finish line. Burnout, getting kicked out, dropping out, and morally failing out are just some of the ends that lead to the inability to survive leadership in the local church. While ministry is difficult and demanding, it is possible to survive the rigors of local church leadership and pastoral ministry for the long game. J. Robert Clinton, in *The Making of a Leader* says, however, that only about 30 percent of leaders survive.¹

There is a crisis of leadership in culture today. Leaders from every corner of the globe are resigning, being fired, or just simply quitting. From the front and center

¹ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 187.

headline stories of leaders caught in a moral failure, scandal, or fraud, to the backdoor irrelevant leaders are shown, the shelf life of leaders is shorter than it ought to be while others sour long before their expiration date. Leaders who were once leading or in a leadership role find themselves no longer leading. Research shows the clear signs that point to the ultimate destination of ministry removal and recusal. H. B. London, Jr. and Neil Wiseman published shocking data showing that “33 percent of pastors confess ‘inappropriate’ sexual behavior with someone in the church.”² Jonathan Merritt shows that “Fourteen percent of pastors and 21 percent of youth pastors say they currently struggle with pornography.”³ While leaders in the local church have faced challenges throughout the centuries, the unique and easy access to a multitudinous amount of pornographic material privately available on smart devices has certainly sparked an increase in this particular trap to which some fall prey. When looking at the sexual revolution of internet pornography, the numbers are shocking—over 40 million Americans admit that they regularly access the over 42 million internet pornography websites, which bring in an annual revenue that is more than the NFL, NBA, and MLB combined.⁴ The Conquer Series, an organization helping men find freedom in sexual addiction, says that “12 percent of pastors say that since they’ve been in ministry, they’ve had sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse. 51 percent of pastors say that internet pornography is a possible temptation for them; 37 percent admit that it’s a current

² H. B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who’ve Been There* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 20.

³ Jonathan Merritt, “Pornography: A Christian Crisis or Overblown Issue,” *Religious News Service*, January 20, 2016, <https://religionnews.com/2016/01/20/christians-pornography-problem/>.

⁴ Conquer Series, “15 Mind-Blowing Statistics about Pornography and the Church,” accessed August 14, 2019, <https://conquerseries.com/15-mind-blowing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church/>. See also The Barna Group, *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016).

struggle.”⁵ The demands on a leader’s family and personal life can be damaging. London and Wiseman explain,

90 percent of pastors work more than 46 hours a week. 80 percent believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively. 33 percent say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family. 75 percent report they’ve had a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry. 50 percent feel unable to meet the needs of the job. 90 percent feel they’re inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands. 40 percent report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.⁶

When it comes to burnout, the statistics are staggering with London and Wiseman finding an astonishing “45.5 percent of pastors saying that they’ve experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.”⁷ Hard work and driven leadership has been a badge of honor, but the constant availability by email, text message, or phone call drives leaders to always be at work wherever they find themselves. It was not until the year 2000 that cell phones connected to the internet, which meant that before then, leaving the office provided the opportunity to remove some forms of communication from the leader’s daily schedule. Barna Group research found that most pastors are faring well, but 1 in 3 is at risk of burnout. More than one-third of pastors are at high or medium risk of burnout, and three-quarters know at least one fellow pastor whose ministry ended due to stress.⁸ Is leadership so difficult, so demanding, and so taxing that there is no possibility of survival? Are moral and ethical standards so absent from the culture that leaders’ perceptions of invincibility and their writing off of what is really wrong leads to hugely immoral acts? Are the demands of leadership so intense, so burdensome, and so belaboring that no mere mortal is capable of leading without burning

⁵ London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 240.

⁶ London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 240.

⁷ London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 172.

⁸ The Barna Group, *The State of Pastors: How Today’s Faith Leaders Are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2017), 11.

out? Have the changes to technology, accessibility of illicit media, and incessant availability provided a simpler on-ramp to destructive patterns?

There must be a way to survive leadership in this cut-throat, dog eat dog, morally depraved culture. What gives some leaders a better chance of survival than others? What causes some leaders to fall out while others survive decades? Is surviving leadership in the local church possible? How can pastors in the local church lead for the long game with a tank filled to surpass survival toward a thriving and healthy leadership?

While the assumption could be made that the local church and ministry may be protected from this happening and from Christian leaders being exempt, the overwhelming trend/evidence is just as glaringly apparent in Christian leadership. Jim Collins writes, “If companies like Motorola and Circuit City—icons that had once served as paragons of excellence—can succumb to the downward forces of gravity, then no one is immune. If companies like Zenith and A&P, once the unquestioned champions in their fields can plummet from great to irrelevant, then we should be wary about our own success.”⁹ However, just because its presence permeates the current cultural reality does not give license to Christian leaders to ignore the reality or write off the undeniable fact of leadership instability because the gospel is at stake. The world is watching. In addition, the world is wishing and wanting solid, courageous, competent leaders of character and they should be able to find them in the local church.

While examples are plentiful of leaders outside of ministry and the local church who fail out, fizzle out, phase out, burn out, and drop out the scope of this project limited surviving leadership to Christian leadership within the local church in the United States. What are the biblical qualifications and disqualifications of a leader in Christian ministry? Surviving leadership is difficult. However, there is a rich legacy of leaders who survived the test, the times, the trials, and the temptations. What are the characteristics,

⁹ Jim Collins, *How the Mighty Fall* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 8.

habits, development, and ability of those leaders who survive the demands, responsibilities, and rigor of leadership? How can a leader truly survive leadership? What characteristics, habits, and protections are necessary for survival? This project unpacks what it takes to survive leadership.

Rationale

I sat in the middle of a full systematic theology class in my first semester of study for my Master of Divinity degree when a professor mentioned to our class of more than 100 ministry leaders, future pastors, and those preparing for ministry around the world, that in five years of ministry, 70 percent of the students in the class would no longer be in vocational ministry. While it came as a shock to me, I began to wonder what factors could lead to such a development. I grew up in the church seeing pastors come and go due to a call from God to pursue another opportunity or accept a position at another church. However, growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, local churches did not come with the ability to follow the pastor through social media to their next ministry post. The global news cycle did not typically include pastors who had been terminated from local church ministry due to embezzlement of church finances; an inappropriate relationship with a person inside or outside the church; a secret and hidden sin that became exposed in a public way; or even a lack of leadership ability that led to a changing of the guard.

In today's communication context and cycle, hearing about another pastor who has failed to make it to the finish line is as common as leadership failures in the secular realm. Because of the increasing number of leaders' inability to survive a career of leadership in the local church, the conversation around surviving leadership must grow so that the ratio of pastors training in seminary to those continuing in ministry decreases. Beyond simply surviving, leaders in the local church must begin to actively pursue and lead in a thriving way that prepares them to lead in the local church and in ministry for the long term.

Living in California means driving in a constant state of traffic. Every hour on Interstate 5, also known as ‘the five,’ is rush hour from the suburbs of Orange County to the urban roads of Los Angeles. A commute on the five is sure to take longer than one planned, expected, or wanted. The traffic is compounded when there is a road hazard and it is exponentially horrendous when there is a traffic accident, slowdown, or stoppage. There are times when I am parked on the interstate, creeping slowly along to finally see that someone is simply changing a flat tire or has been pulled over for a broken taillight. The traffic moves to a stand-still with the slightest of issues because many people just enjoy seeing a good wreck, what the police are up to in a traffic stop, or rubbernecking to be nosy. Just the same, many people both inside and outside of the local church want to see and know the details of a wreck in a ministry career or a derailed leader. This project is not about gloating over the demise of leaders who have fallen and ministries that have failed. Instead, this project equally explores failures and successes to build a life learning from the mistakes of others, so that leaders do not step on landmines. If the rationale were nothing but an airing of dirty laundry of failed leaders, it would have failed.

This project captures the issues behind leadership demise and exposes the traps and downfall of leaders in the local church who did not survive. It works to shape the landscape of how to achieve longevity in leadership. Long-term leadership is absolutely necessary for the sake of the local church, the gospel, and the glory of God. Throughout the New Testament, authors and biblical leaders like the apostle Paul, the writer of Hebrews, and Peter have unpacked the kingdom imperative of perseverance in ministry. From letters of correction to epistles of encouragement, Scripture is packed with examples, principles, and truths to live by and to leverage to avoid the pitfalls of failure and fall-out. Of course, as Scot McKnight accurately writes, “failure and disappointment

and criticism are written into the job description of pastor. You, pastor friend, have a friend in Paul.”¹⁰

While God is absolutely sovereign, and the gospel has survived even the most atrocious act in human history at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, failures in leadership bring an impact. Great leaders of integrity and influence have unnecessarily burned-out in ministry. There are countless negative effects on both the leader and those influenced by their leadership when a leader fails to reflect the life to which Jesus calls his disciples.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to prepare leaders who are considering ministry as a vocation, those pursuing ministry as a calling, and those currently leading in the local church, to serve and lead in a healthy way for a lifetime.

Goals

With surviving leadership in the local church as a primary and driving goal of this project, the guiding principles included:

1. Research the potential traps and dangerous areas of leadership that could lead to burn out, moral fail out, or other types of leadership exoduses in the local church through examining published reports and personal interviews.
2. Develop a profile of a leader who is called to ministry by studying and exploring the calling, gifting, and preparation for leaders in the local church.
3. Identify a biblically robust strategy of personal accountability, and a healthy and fully integrated leadership combining personal spiritual and emotional health for long term survival in ministry.

Research Methodology

With the goal of surviving leadership in the local church, the research began with leaders who were in ministry and were out for a season or indefinitely by exploring potential traps and dangerous areas of leadership that would cause a leader to leave their

¹⁰ Scot McKnight, *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christofromity in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 152.

local church prematurely. Through extensive reading and studying of published stories and personal interviews, the project unpacked more recent history surrounding leaders who didn't survive. This research included the reasons surrounding their removal, termination, or transition out of their local church context. The research also delved into leaders who left the ministry for burn out or just could not make it long term in leadership in the local church. In exploring the reasons behind the failures and fallouts in ministry, local church leaders will be better equipped to avoid the potholes and pitfalls that claimed the leadership of others who did not survive. While each leader is different and each leadership ending is unique, this phase successfully identified a framework profile that served to excavate underlying and often overlooked traits, habits, and characteristics of leaders who do not survive. This goal was considered successful when interviews are completed with eight to ten pastors who are no longer serving in ministry due to ministry failure or burnout.

Another phase of the research examined in detail and depth the reality of a calling to vocational ministry in the local church, with the goal of characterizes a biblical profile of a leader in local ministry. The research revolved around leaders who served and led in a short-term capacity but did not last in ministry. Whether they choose another career path or just dropped out of leadership, this section dug into a biblical call to ministry and preparation necessary for long-term and healthy leadership in a local church. Upon successful completion of this phase, the calling into gospel leadership roles were clearly and biblically defined with evaluative measures for individual leaders exploring their own personal call.

After researching both published articles and personal interviews about those who did not survive ministry in the local church, the research shifted focus toward identifying a strategy for long-term survival in ministry. This goal establishes a practical approach to thrive in leadership. The realities of the difficulty of ministry are often overlooked due to time constraints, a glamorized view of what ministry is about, or

simple naivete within the leader of potentially dangerous territory in ministry. This area of study and research lays a foundation of health, self-discipline and care, and preventative measures that leaders in the local church can employ to protect themselves from pitfalls of leadership. This goal was successfully attained when an expert panel deems it to meet the stated criteria.

The final phase of the research studied leaders who have lasted the course and finished the race of leadership in the local church. Employing the methods of scouring published works and personal interviews, the project examined leaders who have run the race of ministry to its completion. This goal established the better way, a leadership survival plan for local church ministry. The research utilized biblical and theological qualifications to point out how leaders employed a solid theology of self-care and health in leadership. Chapter 4 lays a foundation that can be uniquely built upon by individual pastors that will assist in creating a framework for a thriving and long-term leadership in the local church. The final phase focused on how leaders can structure their lives and leadership around health, integrity, and character to lead well for their career in ministry. This goal was considered successful after successful review by an expert panel.

Throughout the execution of interviews, twenty-two leaders were interviewed for the purpose of this project. Eleven leaders were previously serving in a local church context but for one or more reasons did not remain in their position. These eleven leaders who did not survive included lead pastors of mega churches with an average attendance of over 20,000, pastors leading in smaller church contexts, best-selling authors, and relatively unknown leaders. For the eleven leaders who thrived in a long-term ministry role, I interviewed leaders who served in multiple roles in addition to their pastoral responsibilities, including writing, speaking, teaching, and board membership. These leaders all exhibited influential and fruitful careers and remain faithful to the gospel and to their families to this day.

Definitions and Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Surviving. The term *surviving* is used in this project to refer to leading in the local church for the long term of at least 25 years but not limited to retirement from local church ministry. *Surviving* and *survival* are used interchangeably to refer to failing to cross the finish line. Not leading long term, or not surviving, could be due to a variety of reasons and circumstances both caused by the leader and due to outside forces.

Leadership. For this project, the term *leadership* is used to refer to any pastor, staff, elder, deacon, or any man or woman serving in a full-time, part-time, or volunteer position.

Health. The term *health* is used in conjunction with the individual leader's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. *Health* is used to describe the integrity and character of a leader in the local church.

The delimitation to this project was the local church context in the American Evangelical church. The focus was directed toward leaders in the local church who were terminated due to moral or leadership failure, those who were transitioned out of a church due to changes within the church, lack of favor with staffing boards, or simply quit because of burn-out. Research spanned published articles with information about the end of the leadership role. This project would do a great disservice to limit research to simply looking at the failures. By way of contrast, research also focused on leaders who led well and finished well. This research provides steps and habits that leaders can employ in their own context to grow in health and character that is needed to survive leadership. Throughout the project, I remained committed to the protection of individuals and organizations, both leaders and churches, through anonymity in interview responses. This project utilized the learning of others while maintaining confidentiality.

Conclusion

While the presence of sin cannot be eradicated, local church politics cannot be completely drained of power, and busyness cannot be removed from the minds and hearts of local church leaders, there must be a better way to lead in the local church—a way that includes health and happiness in ministry, and a way that provides longevity with minimal shrapnel in a lifelong career of ministry. In exploring the biblical leaders and truths along with leaders throughout the history of the church, this project unpacked the qualities, habits, and characteristics of leaders who both survived the rigors of ministry and thrived throughout their leadership.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL MODEL FOR HEALTHY LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Biblical Importance of Running the Race of Leadership to Completion

The finish line was in full view and the gold medal prize was less than 100 yards away as University of Oregon steeplechase runner Tanguy Pepiot began waving to the crowd at the Pepsi Team Invitational. Pepiot, a senior at Oregon, was fully confident that he had captured the first-place victory when he began pumping his fists in the air. With 50 yards remaining in the race, he slowed to a cruise and turned his attention to the cheering crowd, as the finish line was now only a few steps away, University of Washington athlete Meron Simon sprinted his last 100 yards to pass the prematurely celebrating Pepiot and earn the top spot in his heat. Tanguy lost the race in which he was certain to win by one tenth of a second. “I thought I was by myself, like, far in front of the second guy,” Pepiot said. “I saw [Simon] on the screen, I tried to pick up, he just got me on the line. I’m not proud of myself right now, but it’s a good lesson for me, I think, not to do this in the future. Next time I’ll just run the whole final stretch and celebrate in the victory lap.”¹

Tanguy Pepiot is not the first athlete to celebrate too early, assuming a victory only to be disappointed in defeat seconds later at the actual finale of the event. In fact, there is an entire community dedicated to those who celebrate too early on the news and

¹ Scott Davis, “College Runner Celebrates Like Crazy before the Finish Line, Loses Race by a Foot,” *Business Insider*, April 13, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/oregon-runner-loses-race-celebrating-too-early-2015-4>.

discussion website Reddit.² Story after story shows highlight videos capturing the moment that an individual or a team begins to celebrate their victory only to be crushed in defeat seconds later. While this is interesting to watch as a spectator and even comical at times, the reality of defeat drives deep into the hearts of those who once held such elation in perceived definite victory. Watching a premature celebration at a sporting event can bring a sinking feeling of missing out on the potential joys of a race run well. Watching the perceived victory of a leader in a local church who does not cross the finish line, who limps across the finish line, or who is disqualified from the race entirely, is a tragedy in which the fallout affects more than just a position on a medal podium. The stories of men and women who do not survive leadership in the local church have far reaching effects on families, churches, communities and those both inside and outside of the local church. The damage caused in each of these specific areas can be avoided. Avoiding these pains should be of great concern for leaders in today's local churches, just like it was in the days of the early church. The good news is that none of these difficulties are new, and just about everything leaders are going through, someone in the Bible has already gone through long before they have or will. This chapter will survey key passages in Hebrews, Paul's writing, and Peter's epistles to explore the model for healthy leadership.

Healthy Leadership as Seen in Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews leveraged the analogy of running in a race to implore followers of Christ to live life well in its entirety and finish the race God starts at salvation. The author challenges Christians, saying, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (12:1).³ A runner would scarcely set out to start a 100-meter dash simply to run 80 yards, stop, and return to the sidelines. Watching an NFL football game,

² Reddit, "Premature Celebrations," accessed November 29, 2019, <https://www.reddit.com/r/Prematurecelebration/>.

³ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

viewers never see a quarterback lead the huddle, call the play, and rush to the line of scrimmage with the offense precisely lined up in the prescribed formation only to stand in waiting until the play clock expires. Likewise, a runner would not set out in a race on the starters command without the goal and prerogative of finishing the race. As the writer of Hebrews so aptly reminds readers, running the race in its entirety requires endurance. The world in which the race is run guarantees difficulty, strife, temptation, and burdens. Believing that simply becoming a Christian means an elimination of all temptations and life's difficulties is as absurd as believing that just being present in a garage makes a person an automobile. This world we call home brings the reality of brokenness, sin, hard days, and ever-present temptations to do the very things God require we not do. One does not have to turn on the television or ask "Alexa" to know that the world is full of struggles and strife.

Because of the Fall, sin entered the world. When sin arrived, broken dreams became reality. Hurt and disappointment are now an ever-present reality, and failure knocks at the door of everyone with a beating heart. Sin does not stop its assault or enticement upon conversion, nor is sin conquered with a silver bullet. This is why the writer describes sin as something that "so easily" finds its way into our lives (12:1). And sin has the potential to knock someone out of the race long before the finish line. It only takes one sin to sabotage the soul. Leaders in the local church do not get a hall pass simply because of the title on their business card. Those in leadership positions are not exempt due to the professional nature of their calling. In their research and subsequent commentary on the current state of pastors, The Barna Group notes, "Before he or she is a church leader, a pastor is a human being. And nothing about being a pastor precludes church leaders from the full human experience—good bad, and ugly."⁴ Todd Wilson captures this similar thought about pastors' humanity masterfully when he concludes,

⁴ The Barna Group, *The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders Are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2017), 10.

Pastors can be godly and yet dysfunctional at the same time. They can be both holy and not whole. They can be both biblically faithful and yet psychologically maladjusted. They can be both spiritually mature and emotionally immature. Pastors can love evangelism yet fear those of a different race or the opposite sex. They can be “prayer warriors” and “control freaks,” powerful preachers and domineering spouses, faithful shepherds and disengaged or overbearing parents. They can love Jesus and be addicted to food, pornography, or pain medication. While these are unsettling juxtapositions, they are, sadly enough, empirically verifiable. This is why we must learn to swallow the sobering truth that pastors can possess real spiritual depth and yet live lives that are riddled by psychological compulsions and emotional reactivity.⁵

The writer of Hebrews directs his challenge to run with endurance to every single follower of Jesus. Leaders do not dodge the directive to run the race with endurance, and luckily, leaders are provided some helpful principles in the race they run.

First, readers are given practical guidance in running the race well when the writer encourages runners to “lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely” (12:1). Runners who are carrying, holding, or shouldering anything extra will surely struggle in running well. As a young athlete and a child growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, I did not have the luxury of going online to research and purchase training equipment to be delivered conveniently in two days or less through Amazon Prime. I could not do a quick search of YouTube to learn the best ways to train for the sport in which I was competing. I could, however, call up companies like Eastbay, and they would send me a free catalog every month with the newest and hottest training equipment. The shocking thing is, they sent me a free catalog month after month and I never spent a dime on their products. Each month, I would look at the newest shoes from brands like Nike and Adidas, imagining what the training apparel could offer my athletic abilities as I meticulously thumbed through each page. One product that intrigued me month after month as a teenager was a product that runners used by strapping a personalized parachute around the waist while simultaneously running with a specially designed pair of shoes that forced you onto the front of your feet. This product came with the

⁵ Todd Wilson, *Tending the Soul, Mind, and Body: The Art and Science of Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 108.

promise of more speed and increased strength. As a sprinter on my high school's track team, I was convinced that I needed this to train so that I could improve my time in the 110-meter high hurdles. Thankfully, my track coach thought our entire team could benefit by training with this contraption and she ordered a few. We unpacked the equipment with visions of grandeur of how this would positively impact our team's standing in the district. Three of us voluntarily became the guinea pigs and buckled into the parachute system and strapped on the shoe trainers. At the sound of coach's whistle, we jumped, only to realize we could not run at all, let alone train with this ridiculous invention. While runners and athletes still try anything and everything to gain a competitive edge, runners are not seen carrying anything additional when in a race. The writer of Hebrews knew the absurdity of having extra weight, which is why the author commands followers of Christ to throw it off and lay it aside.

R. Albert Mohler warns of the consequences of not taking this command from Hebrews seriously when he says, "If we don't, we won't endure."⁶ This weight of sin sticks around in such close proximity that some translations refer to it as a besetting sin. As commentator R. Kent Hughes notes, "We each have characteristic sins that more easily entangle us than others. Some sins that tempt and degrade others hold little appeal for us – and vice versa."⁷ Christians do not even have to go looking for it. Sin comes, as the singer song-writer Bob Dylan puts it, "knock, knock, knockin'" at the door of our daily life. Not only must Christians throw off the sin that clings so closely, which should be obvious, but they must also lay aside every weight or hindrance. Not everything that weighs a person down or becomes a hindrance in life is bad. In fact, a hindrance could be, Hughes suggests that something that can be "otherwise good, that weighs you down spiritually. It could be a friendship, an association, an event, a place, a habit, a pleasure,

⁶ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman, 2017), 195.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 387.

an entertainment, an honor. But if this otherwise good thing drags you down, you must strip it away.”⁸ As a runner who has competed knows, race day clothes are minimal and lightweight. Only what is necessary in bodily coverage. Likewise, leaders must retain only what is necessary in running the race of life and ministry well.

By way of encouragement through example, the writer of Hebrews provides stories as evidence of a race that was run well throughout Hebrews 11; stories of great faith, stories of great leadership, and stories of runners who finished the race God entered them in. In dramatic form, Hebrews 11 draws the reader into a great scene of great faith. Hughes describes the scene:

The scene is a great coliseum. The occasion is a footrace, a distance event. The contestants include the author and the members of his flock and, by mutual faith, us. The cloud of witnesses that fills the stadium are the great spiritual athletes of the past, Hall of Faith members—every one a gold medal winner. They are not live witnesses of the event, but witnesses by the fact that their past lives bear witness to monumental, persevering faith.⁹

These are by no means stories of perfection that only leave a person striving to follow Jesus well feeling defeated by way of an impossible standard. The well-known story of Noah, while a great story of the faith that led Noah to build a boat before a drop of rain fell, does not make for the friendliest child’s cartoon television show with a storybook ending. Even after experiencing God’s protection of his family, Noah blundered the ending by becoming drunk and laying naked (Gen 9:20-21). Similarly, Abraham famously had faith in God’s promise, but not to the fullest extent that kept him from exploring his options with Hagar instead of his wife, Sarai (Gen 16). The narratives providing the background to Hebrews 11 are not absent of brokenness and sin, not to mention the inclusion of the story of Rahab the prostitute. Stories that serve, as Dana Harris comments, “to draw on past examples of faith to encourage faithfulness in his

⁸ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 387.

⁹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 386.

present audience as well as to create solidarity with those who have gone before.”¹⁰ They are encouraging stories of faith in the God who provides the absolutely perfect example in and through Jesus. This reality was not lost on the writer of Hebrews, who points readers to the only possibility of running a race with endurance: by looking to Christ. Hebrews 12:2-3 says, “Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” The sobering reality is that leaders cannot run the race well and with endurance without Christ. While this great cloud of witnesses encourages and even inspires, the One who keeps leaders in this race is Christ alone,¹¹ and his perseverance in the face of persecution and crucifixion as the supreme example for believers.¹²

It is only possible to run the race well and finish this race by fixing one’s gaze on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. This is what commentator R. Kent Hughes so aptly puts as being absorbed with Jesus.¹³ Living and leading well means there must be a conscious and intentional move away from that which distracts, and a move toward looking to Jesus. *The Jesus Bible* takes the thought from Hebrews 11 a step further:

Perception is a powerful thing. The author of Hebrews encouraged Christians to stare obsessively at Jesus in the face of their circumstances. While remembering Jesus in everything is a wonderful idea, it is difficult actually to do. Life is full of needs and demands, and people can easily become distracted by things that are inconsequential; they become burdened by things that are beyond their ability to control. Despite the problems of life, God wants people to look to Jesus. When people get a glimpse of who God really is, they then see themselves for what they really are, and life comes into focus. God tells people to look to Jesus because doing

¹⁰ Dana M. Harris, *Hebrews*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville: B & H, 2019), 297.

¹¹ Mohler, *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, 196.

¹² Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 639.

¹³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 391.

so actually has a transformative effect on life. Paul spoke of this as well when writing to encourage the church to be faithful to Jesus. He told them that as they beheld God's glory, God would transform them and change their lives (2 Corinthians 3:18). Put simply, people become what they behold.¹⁴

Running the race well and to completion is a foundational truth not only in Hebrews, but also with Peter's letters.

Healthy Leadership as Seen in Peter's Writing

Peter, the great apostle and early follower of Jesus gives his great, albeit not perfect, example of a life well lived for Christ. Not only does his life, captured in the narrative of the Gospels and Acts, give direction on living and leading well for the long run, but his letter to believers throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1) provides some concrete ethical responsibilities¹⁵ for current culture today. While life and leadership look different due to evolving technology, Peter's principles remain significant for leaders in the church today who are living in times when social values and structures are changing rapidly.¹⁶ These timeless truths written by Peter have proven significant throughout church history in shaping the moral and ethical life of believers. Edmund Clowney says that 1 Peter is "the most condensed New Testament resume of the Christian faith and of the conduct it inspires."¹⁷

Many commentators describe the audience of these letters as believers who were not Jewish, did not have the religious background that a person of Jewish faith would have, and who did not necessarily grow up surrounded with spiritual things.¹⁸

¹⁴ *The Jesus Bible*, NIV ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 1914.

¹⁵ Sam Storms, *Hebrews-Revelation*, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 289.

¹⁶ Peter A. Lillback captures in amazing form the multidonous principles in Peter's biblical writing in his book *Saint Peter's Principles: Leadership for Those Who Already Know Their Incompetence* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2019).

¹⁷ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 15.

¹⁸ Thomas Schreiner's commentary on this specific audience references Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 4; Best, *1 Peter*, 19; Davids, *First Peter*, 8-9; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 50-51; Winbery, "Introduction to First

They were, however, believers who were constantly inundated with the Greco-Roman culture that pervaded every aspect of life. These spiritual children of Peter began their life as pagans who bowed to gods who were believed to possess great power, but not greater virtue, than the humans who bowed to them. Popular religions of the day, polytheism and emperor worship, demanded from their followers loyalty and little more. Philosophical and ethical systems, led by Stoicism and Epicureanism, aimed to minimize pain and realize sustainable pleasures.¹⁹ There is no doubt that Hellenization was suggesting a certain way of life that was counter to the Christian way of life. Not having the upbringing of a Jewish and monotheistic person, a Gentile would have had legitimate and honest questions about what was expected in the life of a Christian. So, Peter set out to prove that, as Karen Jobes points out, “Jesus is not only the object of Christian faith; he is also the pattern of Christian life.”²⁰ Believers cannot and must not separate their own life from the life of Jesus in their conduct. The implications of how Jesus lived and how the believer ought to live are interwoven throughout this letter from the apostle. Peter concisely and credibly lays the foundation for this life which has a profound impact on the life of a leader in the local church.

Peter starts his letter by reminding readers of the great salvation that believers have experienced in Christ. First Pet 1:3-5 reads, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are

Peter,” 6; and Michaels, *1 Peter*, xlv-xlvi. Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 38. Selwyn says the readers were mixed in *First Peter*, 42-44. Bechtler argues the letter addresses Gentiles only in *Following in His Steps*, 61-63. S. McKnight notes that the readers may have been God-fearers in *1 Peter*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 24.

¹⁹ Daniel M. Doriani, *1 Peter*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014), 39.

²⁰ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 1.

being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” The hope experienced by believers is not a religious rabbit’s foot that conveniently hangs from the rearview mirror in the journey of their life. The salvation obtained by Christ is not just a collection of spiritual sayings that a Christian can recall to memory in a troubled time to get through to the other side. This living and active hope is wholly and completely purchased by Christ, which means as a follower of Christ, this hope is real and does not fade, retreat, or stop in any circumstance. It was not procured by human performance nor is its security dependent on human power or effort. Similar to the writer of Hebrews, Peter begins by reminding followers of Jesus to look to Christ. When unpacking Peter’s introduction, Sam Storms points out, “In the first twelve verses of 1 Peter (which in the Greek text is one long sentence), there is not a single command: no imperatives, admonitions, or exhortations. There is nothing but glorious affirmations and declarations of the saving grace of God in Christ. Thus, to this point Peter has focused exclusively on what God has done.”²¹ Peter knew that until and unless someone gets this, they will not understand how they ought to live. Peter moves from what is true of the gospel to what logically ought to be true in the life of a believer with the word *therefore*.

This one word points the reader back to the previous truths in chapter 1. Given the fact that believers have a new identity in Christ and new status as adopted sons and daughters, they are instructed to live differently. Everything Peter has unpacked about the grace God has given leads up to the life exhortations he is going to write about. Religion leads with the notion that if we obey, God will love us, but Peter says that God loves us, so we obey. The Christian conduct Peter lays out as required for believers depends on the grace that God has given. His instruction to holiness finds its foundation in the hope of the gospel. “It’s crucial—*crucial*—to understand that it’s not our pursuit of holiness that qualifies us to see the Lord. Rather, we are qualified to see the Love *by the Lord*, not by

²¹ Storms, *Hebrews-Revelation*, 308-9.

good things we do.”²² In reminding those early followers of the gospel, he now refers readers to the right response of a life well lived. Because of what Jesus has accomplished, life must be lived differently. In his commentary on First Peter, David Helm digs deeper into this different life in view of God’s grace:

When we live lives that are modeled on God’s holy character, we demonstrate that we have internalized the call to set our hope on our eternal inheritance. Conversely, whenever we find ourselves trapped and enslaved to sin—when all we can do is continue grasping for the pleasures of the world—we reveal to the world, and to God, that we place too little value on the grace that is to be ours with the coming of Christ.²³

Were it not for the grace of God, no believer would be able to live the life God calls them to! I. Howard Marshall places a sequential order on grace and life when he writes, “First must come the gospel and only then the response to it. First, we hear of what God has graciously done for us, and then of what we are to do in obedience to him. The latter is not possible except when it is made so by the former.”²⁴

The *indicatives* from 1 Peter 1:1-12 lead to the *imperatives* found starting in 1 Peter 1:13-2:3, which form the fully *integrated* gospel life. The fully integrated life brings together elements of a single system together into a unified whole. Leaders in the local church must integrate the gospel into every fiber of their life. Imagine Billy Mays promoting OxyClean on a television advertisement returning home to use Tide Detergent. He spends his career passionately urging consumers to utilize the greatest product in the clothes cleaning industry. He has built his empire and wealth on rhetorically arguing that OxyClean is the way households should launder their clothes. Nobody would expect to find anything but what he says is the best stocked in his laundry room. As silly as it

²² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

²³ David R. Helm, *1-2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ’s Sufferings* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 59

²⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 49.

sounds, this is the way Peter describes a proper response to the gospel. Christians practice what they preach when they use what they sell.

This integration can be seen in an 18-inch gap, the distance between the head and the heart. While this physiological distance is close in proximity, the gap that exists between what a person knows is true and how that person lives what is true can be enormous. Why is it that so many godly leaders who have experienced the gospel personally live in such stark contrast to the life God designed? I believe it is in part due to this 18-inch gap. The truths of the gospel have not shaped the life that is lived because of a momentary, temporary, or instantaneous lapse, or traffic jam on the 18 inch gap. This 18-inch gap does not always create a disastrous result of a major moral failure. There are times when it causes a forgetfulness in faith. Looking at the story of Moses, one sees a leader widely recognized throughout Christian circles. Following a moment of fear standing barefoot before a burning bush, he leaned more on his speech impediment than on the faith that God would be with him and equip him. Then there is the story of Jonah, a story of Jonah's racism, bigotry, and prejudice blinding him to the truth that God created all humans in His image, including the Ninevites. Other stories like that of the Israelites preferring slavery in Egypt over the journey to God's promised land. Jesus even shared parables of this phenomenon throughout the gospels: the Rich Young Ruler, the Prodigal Son, and the knowledge content kings known as the Pharisees. Each person knew what was right and even knew the truth, but failed to integrate the truth with his life. Of course, these instances of the 18-inch gap are not just reserved for biblical characters and parables. From famed Christian comedians to celebrity pastors in the pulpit, the lack of integration is revealed time and time again through the simple distance of 18 inches.

In his concern for the personal life of the believer and his heart in pastoral delivery, Peter shifts into the practical outworking of the gospel in the life of a believer. Peter writes, "Therefore, preparing your minds for action" (1 Pet 1:13), immediately

assuming that believers are actively preparing for action. There is no doubt that the believers to whom this letter was distributed were being actively attacked from all sides. The buffet of options from the available Greco-Roman gods would have been endless. The opportunity to worship a god of their choosing would have been commonplace. The offering of religious and spiritual worship was plentiful and yet none of the options held water or weight in changing one's life. When preparing to live life as a leader, it is critical to understand that attack is looming, weapons are always being loaded and aimed the leader's way, and the enemy is preparing a bespoke plan of attack geared at taking a leader out. Peter experienced this and knew this ever-present threat himself, which led him to write later in his letter, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

A story out of South Africa details the demise of a suspected rhinoceros poacher who went out hunting rhino when he was trampled by elephants. His hunting group apparently escaped and left him behind which led to lions in the wild devouring everything but his skull and trousers.²⁵ This morbid yet true story captures the picture Peter is attempting to paint for believers when warning that we have an enemy who is just waiting in the bushes to come out and consume every ounce of us. All too often, this enemy knows us better than we know ourselves, which lends to a crisis that takes out a leader in seconds. While crisis does not make or build character, it sure reveals it. Peter knew this and begs his readers to grapple with the reality that we must always be prepared for action by invoking a common phrase. Early hearers and readers of this letter would have resonated with Peter's use of the idea of girding up your loins. Daniel Doriani takes students back to this well-known cultural idea of girding up your loins: "For the whole of biblical history, most people wore loose robes that worked well for ordinary

²⁵ Andy Hayes, "Trousers and Skill All That Remains after Poacher Eaten by Lions and Trampled by Elephant," April 8, 2019, <https://news.sky.com/story/poacher-eaten-by-lions-after-being-trampled-by-an-elephant-11686959>.

activities, but inhibited strenuous labor, fighting, and running. To gird up the loins is to wrap up flowing garments to gain freedom to work hard or run.”²⁶ Modern readers can catch the drift of his challenge with the phrase “roll up your sleeves” and get ready. Peter continues to develop the concept of prepared action by urging readers and listeners to be “sober-minded” through invoking their mind and head. He has already tapped into the heart with his introduction by reminding those who have put their faith in Christ of the hope that is sure and in Christ. But in preparing for action, leaders must continue by being clear headed and mentally alert with a disciplined attention. While leaders must balance the ability to have multiple plates spinning, none of the distractions, hindrances, or weights must capture their mind completely. Leaders must continually fight for the integrated life of a prepared mind leading a healthy heart. Instead, Peter suggests, “Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:14). If leaders in the local church want to lead well for the long game, it starts and finishes with the gospel. Doriani reminds those who study 1 Peter that the “gospel isn’t the first step of many; it is the core of the faith, the hub of the wheel. The gospel is not for outsiders and beginners, something that insiders supersede as we grow in knowledge and obedience. Grace makes us strong. From it all action radiates.”²⁷

Peter continues by bringing to mind the idea of Christians being children of God. Our youngest son, Bauer, is 6 years old at the time of this writing²⁸ and if someone saw a photograph of me when I was six years old, one would think I was showing a current picture of our son Bauer. We have been out in public at an event, at the grocery store, or enjoying a nice meal at a restaurant when a random person whom we have never met approaches us with a smile telling us that Bauer looks just like me. The way that he

²⁶ Doriani, *1 Peter*, 38.

²⁷ Doriani, *1 Peter*, 55.

²⁸ Although our son, Bauer, truly is six years old, he would quickly and aptly tell you that he is not six years old, he is six and a half years old.

smiles and the movement of his eyebrows which create a slight half-moon shape around his eyes looks just like me. His eye color and the depth of blue evidence that he is indeed a “Reed boy.” The way he stands as he watches a show or walks through the aisles of Target is exactly like me. But not only does he look just like me, he wants to live just like me. When he was younger, if asked what his favorite color is, he would promptly say orange. If approached and questioned on what his favorite football team is, without skipping a beat he would reply with Tennessee Volunteers, possibly even offering to sing a verse and chorus of “Rocky Top.” Children often look, talk, walk like, laugh, and live like their parents. This is what Peter encourages in 1:14. “As obedient children,” we ought to look like our father. Doriani explains, “It is normal for God’s family to obey the Father and to walk in the way marked by his character and law.”²⁹

Peter continues by saying, “Don’t be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance” (1 Pet 1:14), calling to mind for his audience the fact that even Christians were previously commanded by a life and culture of sin. Their former reality cannot shape their current character. It is foolish to allow character to be molded by former ignorance. While believers currently live in the culture, they have to not indulge in the desires of culture, but rather place their desires and pursuits in Christ. Peter recognizes that the feelings and inclinations of the previous life outside of Christ are still present, but followers of Christ must not be conformed to them any longer. Instead of living like they previously did, they instead ought to look at the example of Christ: “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet 1:15). Peter continues,

Since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Pet 1:16-19)

²⁹ Doriani, *1 Peter*, 40.

The life Christians now live is a life purchased at great cost. Jesus did not die on the cross simply to provide eternal life, he came to give a new life and an abundant life (John 10:10). Gospel-centered leaders are called to create a way of life that is fueled by the gospel and filled by the Holy Spirit. Sinclair Ferguson said that there are “three possible relationships of the Word and the Spirit in the church. We can have the Word without the Spirit and we will ‘dry up.’ We can try to have the Spirit without the Word, and we will ‘blow up.’ Or we can have the word and the Spirit, and we will ‘grow up.’”³⁰

Peter says this new life is accomplished by staying in and close to the Word of God. Leaders must consistently and constantly be in the Word, with a steady and constant diet of Scripture if they are to succeed and survive in leadership. First Peter 1:22-25 says.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Leaders who survive build their lives on an enormous amount of Scripture so that they have to step over a lot of it in order to sin and stumble. Psalm 119:9 says, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.” The reality is that sin causes people to act irrationally and irresponsibly, and a tool to dislodge the minds and hearts of leaders in the local church from the trap of sin is to be consumed by the truth of Scripture.

Peter moves from the gospel as the foundation of salvation and life into how this is fleshed out in life and leadership. In 1 Peter 2:1-3, he urges, “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” In this list of a series of sins and sinful attitudes, Marshall

³⁰ Lillback, *Saint Peter's Principles*, 77.

points out that Peter “catalogs the love-spoiling vices that Christians must lay aside.”³¹ These sins that Peter urges believers to eradicate from their lives are all sins that harm not only the sinner, but those in the community and relationship with the sinner. The impact of sin in the life of a believer is rarely limited to the individual, which is especially true of leaders in the local church. In fact, the sins that Peter mentions, as Thomas Schreiner says, “tear at the social fabric of the church, ripping away the threads of love that keep them together.”³² Malicious intent never thinks about building up another person, but instead leverages all means necessary to tear someone or some organization down. Twisting the truth and telling lies breaks relationship. Hypocrisy communicates that one’s personal preferences matter more than established truths. Envy destroys the intimacy of individuals by placing primacy of products and profits above the person. Slander seeks to utilize words to tear down instead of building up like Paul instructs (Eph 4:29).

Above all, Peter reminds believers of their identity, a new identity in Christ. In contrasting those who are not followers, who have not been adopted into God’s family, and who are not given a new life in the gospel, Peter says, “They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do” (1 Pet 2:8). Following Jesus means following His Word. Those whose lives have been changed by the gospel are different. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Pet 2:9). These words of royalty and excellencies describe what Jesus has done for every believer. God could have chosen anyone at any point in history, but he specifically chose those who would put their faith in him to be in his family, part of his clan. Not only that, but Christians are now considered royalty, children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. A people set apart from the rest of the world, set aside for great

³¹ Marshall, *1 Peter*, 62.

³² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 98.

things. And when people know their identity, they can maximize their life mission. Peter continues,

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Pet 2:9-12)

The life followers of Christ are called to live is both for us and our good, and also for the glory of God. In one sense, the life that God created His followers to live is the best life, knowing that God's plan as revealed in His Word is good and true. On the other hand, Christians are not celebrated for a life well lived, God is! When people see the life well lived, they see Christ.

The Christian faith was never meant to last for only one generation. Local churches were not created and designed with one leader in mind to lead and then close the doors. For leaders in the local church to carry out their calling and task without previous and future generations in mind is nothing short of reckless. Just as parents do not raise their children just to survive the day, leaders cannot work with just the day's checklist in mind. I deeply and desperately desire a thriving, healthy, biblically and theologically sound local church for my grandchildren's grandchildren to call their church home. This is why Christians and leaders in the local church are invited by the apostles to live a life worthy of the gospel. Their life was not a life lived in isolation and captivity to his generation. The gospel centered life is not a life that is carefully crafted to avoid landmines for the sake of retaining your limbs. It is not a life that just does not want to mess up and subvert the chance of embarrassment. The gospel is at stake! The kingdom beyond the leader's personal platform, social media followers, and church growth is in mind. This concept will be explored more in chapter 4.

Healthy Leadership as Seen in Paul's Letters

Throughout his Epistles, the apostle Paul also employed metaphors to drive home the point of developing character. Using imagery from the gymnasium and the athletics track, he wants believers in Jesus to develop strength, build stamina, and not be feeble in faith (1 Cor 9:24-27; Eph 4:16; 1 Thess 3:2, 13; 2 Thess 2:17; 3:3). Using agricultural imagery, he wants to see roots go down deep and fruit develop (1 Cor 3:5-9; 2 Cor 9:10; Gal 5:22; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10; 2:7). Using educational imagery, he wants them to 'learn Christ' (Eph 4:20). In fact, Paul's letters frequently make various connections to sports, boxing, wrestling, track and field, and various kinds of athletics.³³ When it came to leading well and finishing well, Paul chose the image of running a race. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul writes,

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Everyone who has flown domestically or internationally has experienced the general boarding and pre-flight instructions given by the crew, flight attendants, or by video. In welcoming everyone onto the aircraft and preparing passengers for a flight, the crew gives detailed instructions for enjoying the flight safely, and then proceeds to educate passengers on procedures for the unlikely event of an evacuation or loss of cabin pressure. While many passengers are busy organizing their carry-on luggage, some passengers may find instructions interesting when the crew explicitly instructs all passengers to ensure that they secure their own oxygen mask before assisting others.³⁴ If for some reason the aircraft becomes a cruise liner, the airline crew also reminds passengers to bind their own personal vest before helping others. While the pre-flight information is often tuned out or

²⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 172.

³⁴ Kevin N. Lawrence, *Your Oxygen Mask First: 17 Habits to Help High Achievers Survive and Thrive in Leadership and Life* (San Bernardino, CA: Lioncrest Publishing, 2017).

disregarded because of familiarity, the ideas behind them are critical leadership principles found in Scripture, lived by leaders, and taught by the apostle Paul. Leaders in the local church would be wise to not disregard the leadership truths by switching on their noise cancelling headphones while instruction is being given.

There is certainly no shortage of leadership content, conferences, and curriculum. Thousands of companies spend millions of dollars each year hosting leadership conferences and events to help their management team and its employees become better leaders. A simple search of the word “leadership” on the popular website Amazon.com returns 294,334 books on the topic. And yet, Timothy Laniak posits, “At a time when books on leadership are being published at a dizzying pace, one wonders if the Bible has anything to say about it.”³⁵ Leadership truths and principles abound throughout Scripture. Examples of what great leaders look like can be found in both the Old and New Testament, as well as leaders who failed in big ways. For the scope of this section, the Epistles in the New Testament provide parameters for the discussion of Christian leadership and how it should be understood. The apostle Paul wrote letters throughout his ministry to instruct, correct, discipline, and encourage, providing what Ralph Martin describes as “continuing leadership in the churches.”³⁶ His letters, written after his conversion and during his missionary journeys, deal not only with growth issues, but often address crises within the early Christian communities. Throughout his writing and life as a follower of Jesus, Paul gives an exemplary pastoral model not only by providing gold nuggets of leadership wisdom, but also with the authority that comes from Christ.³⁷ He is remembered by J. Oswald Sanders among others as “one of the most versatile leaders the church has known.

³⁵ Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 252.

³⁶ Ralph Martin, *New Testament Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 2:306.

³⁷ Derek Tidball, *Ministry by the Book: New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 108.

A natural leader by any measure, Paul became a great spiritual leader when his heart and mind were captured by Jesus Christ.”³⁸ Many in his day and even today venture to say that Paul is the premier example of Christian leadership.³⁹ In the Epistles, Paul clearly communicates his deep love and care for those he is leading, from letters in which Sanders points out are “filled with encouragement, gracious in compliment, and rich in sympathy.”⁴⁰ However, Paul’s letters were not always solely for the purpose of encouragement. There were times, circumstances, and sins that demanded his direct rebuke and discipline of a church body. Regardless of the tone and circumstances surrounding the church and the subsequent letter he wrote, permeating all of Paul’s epistles are common themes of leadership that cannot be tuned out. In Ephesians, he urges believers to “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1). To the church in Phillipi, Paul charges them to “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27). In Colossians, he directs them to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:10). Paul reminds the Galatians of God’s expectation that their life be marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (5:22-23). Paul knew that for leaders to lead well and be successful, they must lead themselves toward a godly character and Christ-like love. Not like the empty religious piñatas who Paul exposes as false leaders elsewhere who display the right decorum on their exterior, but whose inner life is not shaped by the truth of the gospel.

³⁸ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 44.

³⁹ Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 3.

⁴⁰ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 89.

So, what does this life look like in leaders? Ruth Haley Barton contends, “A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what’s going on inside himself, inside her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.”⁴¹ Paul knew with great confidence when he was giving leaders the priority of focusing on character, the temptation for leaders to think they are above the need to develop godly character (Rom 12:3). In writing and leading the churches in the epistles, he continually reminded them that they must secure their own oxygen mask before trying to put someone else’s on by keeping a close watch on their life, so that what they profess publicly is the life they practice personally. Paul David Tripp asserts, “Ministries are derailed because leaders begin to think they have arrived and don’t do the protective things that they warn everyone else to do.”⁴² Thus, character must be in full focus full time, because, as Mohler reminds readers, “character is indispensable to credibility, and credibility is essential to leadership.”⁴³ While it is essential that leaders focus on character, many allow character to disappear to the back burner. Character is a virtue that does not include widespread and public celebrations from modern culture. It is widely absent in the model of current politicians and is typically not found as a foundational emphasis in many business leadership books. Even so, character is a foundational component of leadership for Paul in both surviving and thriving in the long game.

A Christian leader’s first concern should be developing his character through a relationship with Christ. The great pastor John Owen said, “A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what that minister is on his knees in

⁴¹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018) 38.

⁴² Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 68.

⁴³ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 80.

secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more.”⁴⁴ Paul instructed the church in Corinth to “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (2 Cor 13:5-6). To be a great leader, one must first start by examining his life and keeping a close watch on himself, his relationship with Christ, and his character. In a masterful way, Paul makes the connection between what we believe, the values we hold, and the behavior we exhibit. The humbling principle for leaders here is communicated well by Derek Thomas when he maintains, “A congregation rarely, rarely rises above the level of godliness portrayed in its own leadership.”⁴⁵

In his classic work *The Reformed Pastor*, Richard Baxter says to “take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn.”⁴⁶ The well-known saying rings true in the life of a leader: it takes years to build character and only seconds to destroy it. But is character valued in the current Christian leadership landscape? More often, leaders focus on capitalizing on their strengths, developing a good marketing strategy for growth in the organization, or other areas of competency. However, Carey Nieuwhof suggests that leaders must “work twice as hard on their character as they do on their competency.”⁴⁷ It might be true that a leader’s competency gets them in the door, but character keeps them there. To continually develop character in the life of a leader, the leader must not listen to themselves, but rather preach to themselves.⁴⁸ Character is not accidentally achieved or

⁴⁴ I. D. E. Thomas, *Puritan Golden Treasury* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 192.

⁴⁵ Derek Thomas, “A Solemn Charge” (sermon delivered First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, June 10, 2007, <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/to-the-end-of-the-earth-47-a-solemn-charge>).

⁴⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth), 67.

⁴⁷ Carey Nieuwhof, *Didn’t See It Coming: Overcoming the Seven Greatest Challenges That No One Expects and Everyone Experiences* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2018), 50.

⁴⁸ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 84.

happened upon after a certain number of years in leadership. Kevin DeYoung reveals that “living well must become intentional.”⁴⁹

Paul repeatedly instructed the church in Corinth to imitate him (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). He knew with confidence and conviction what D. A. Carson captures when he writes, “A great deal of what we learn comes by imitating someone else”⁵⁰ and that Paul was living the worthy life he talked about. He taught and lived the reality that a true leader is an example for others to follow. Derek Tidball reminds readers that “imitation of respected people was the way in which character developed and maturity was reached.”⁵¹ It has been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but Paul seems to take it to the next level indicating that imitation is vital to being a follower of Jesus. Paul embodied those principles of character and leadership that he wrote about in his letters. He balanced the tension of humility and confidence with his bold proclamation of the gospel. Demonstrated in his sermons, teachings, and writings are the characteristics of a leader walking closely in the counsel of Scripture. When a leader truly lives by example, the principles he teaches are more likely to be followed, and his expectations will more likely be met. In his letters to the Corinthians, as Paul emphasizes the necessity of character in a leader, he reveals his heart and mind.⁵² Paul, Carson writes, “prescribes what Christian leaders must be and how Christians must view Christian leaders.”⁵³ The church in Corinth held a special place in Paul’s heart; his ministry built relationships with

⁴⁹ Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 111.

⁵⁰ D. A. Carson, *Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 14.

⁵¹ Tidball, *Ministry by the Book*, 118.

⁵² Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity*, 14.

⁵³ D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 9.

the Corinthians that spanned a seven-year period.⁵⁴ While Paul loved the church there, they proved to be one of his most demanding and difficult churches to serve with, and his time leading the church in Corinth marked a period where Carson indicates, “He faced some of the worst opposition and most frightening dangers he had ever confronted.”⁵⁵

Corinth was strategically located in modern day Greece between two harbors, one leading to Asia and the other to Italy. Colin Kruse reveals, “Ancient Corinth, then, lay at the crossroads of two important trade routes.”⁵⁶ That location brought in an abundance of trade, an abundance of wealth, a multitude of religions and cults, and a vast array of opportunity for sin. Schreiner, commenting on Corinth suggests, “The city was stocked with all kinds of cults and gods. In Corinth we find temples for Apollo, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Asclepius, Demeter and Kore.”⁵⁷ From a religious and cult sense, Corinth was the buffet of options, flavors, and opportunities. However, more than religions, more than wealth and trade, author Paul Gardner concludes, “Corinth was known for its immorality. Yet Corinth had a worse name than most. The name of the town even became a byword for sexual promiscuity, and to be a ‘Corinthiastes’ was to be a profligate.”⁵⁸ In the time of Paul, Corinth became a resort town, always crowded and busy, full of travelers looking for a new experience and a good time. Very quickly and accurately, Corinth developed a reputation for debauchery.⁵⁹ Paul did not minimize the cultural corruption around Corinth as an excuse for ignoring character. Instead, in his two letters he begins to address the

⁵⁴ John Stott, *The Message of 2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 13.

⁵⁵ Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity*, 21.

⁵⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 24.

⁵⁷ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 2.

⁵⁸ Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 27.

⁵⁹ John MacArthur, *Book on Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 63.

problem of sin and the need to develop character. In 1 Corinthians, he addresses their questions about marriage (7:1-24), virgins (7:25-40), food offered to idols (8:1–11:1), spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), the collection (16:1-4), and even corrected some misconceptions they had about what real Christian leadership is. Throughout Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, it can be seen clearly that he had received a significant amount of information about what was going on in that church from several reliable sources, which had likely been happening for an extended period of time. For the sake of the gospel, he addressed these character issues, calling the believers in Corinth to a new standard. First Corinthians 10:31 says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.” The reality is that Christian leaders, according to Henri Nouwen, “can be fruitful only if they grow out of a direct and intimate encounter with our Lord.”⁶⁰

When it comes to building and developing godly character, self-care and self-awareness are critical. No one else will prioritize character development and self-examination for the leader. Nor will anybody perform self-evaluation and care for a leader. It is the responsibility of leaders to discipline themselves for the purpose of godliness, drawing near to God, and becoming primary students of their own teaching, a responsibility which cannot be relaxed. Dan Dumas and Randy Stinson suggest, “You can’t lead others until you lead yourself.”⁶¹ A leader will never lead someone to a place that he or she has not gone themselves. One of the most important things a leader can do, Barton writes, “is keep seeking God in the depths of my own soul—no matter the cost”⁶²

⁶⁰ Henri Nouwen, *Way of the Heart* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 21.

⁶¹ Randy Stinson and Dan Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2011), 52.

⁶² Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 30.

Thomas Schreiner in *Faithful Leadership* says, “Be sure to feed your own soul. Don’t think first about how the Word feeds others but let God restore and strengthen you through his Word. If we neglect time in the Word and prayer, then we will wither and grow cold and brittle in our relationship with God.”⁶³ While self-care is vital, leaders cannot limit the examination of their character and integrity to only themselves. Accountability and community are a critical portion of self-care and leadership. There are simply some things that a person can only learn in the context of relationships within community. Paul warns of the ease of slipping into exemption from self-care and discipline, saying, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

While character is critical, it is not exhaustive in defining Christian leadership. Albert Mohler, a highly respected and influential leader himself, says, “No leader can be effective without character, but character does not ensure that a leader is effective. There are many people with sterling character who are not leaders. A good leader stands out when character is matched by competence and the central virtue of knowing what to do.”⁶⁴ There are necessary executive abilities, passion for casting vision, and ability to pursue and motivate others to follow included in the makeup of great leaders. While morals do not make the leader, and leaders are not made by morals, a lack of morality crushes the influence and credibility of the leader to lead at capacity. Nobody instantly becomes a great leader at their moment of conversion. A Christian leader’s work, as Paul David Tripp reminds readers, “is not shaped just by his knowledge, gifts, skill, and experience but also by the condition of his heart.”⁶⁵ However, leaders cannot stand on character alone, but must strive for excellence in all aspects of their leadership influence.

⁶³ Thomas Schreiner, “Faithful Service,” in *More Faithful Service*, R. Albert Mohler, Jr. et al., (Louisville: SBT Press, 2016), 12.

⁶⁴ Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 83.

⁶⁵ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 99.

Nieuwhof states, “Your competency leaves the first impression, but your character leaves the lasting one.”⁶⁶

Whether the leader is a businessman or a pastor, leadership must start in the home. Paul writes to a pastor that he was mentoring, instructing him that a leader must be able to manage his home well before he can even think about leading or managing something or someone else well (1 Tim 3:1-5). But so often, the last thing on a busy leader’s mind is what is going on at home. Too often in the busyness of work or ministry, the home and family are the first to be forgotten when it should be the first to be taken into consideration. If the fires in the home grow cold in pursuit of lofty aspirations in ministry, even if they are good aspirations, then leaders in the local church will miss the first ministry to which God calls them. Paul writes in Ephesians 5 and 6 how the structure of leadership should be in the home:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 5:22–6:4)

Clearly, the theme that Jesus portrays and defines as true leadership is displayed here, with Christ at the center. The theme of serving, sacrificing, and of selflessness runs throughout this passage which deals with marriage and family. As for leaders, Paul encourages the husband to love, and serve his wife, and even sacrifice “as Christ loved

⁶⁶ Nieuwhof, *Didn't See It Coming*, 39.

the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). The selflessness of the biblical leader is shown in Ephesians 5:28: “In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.” For Paul here, laying out the biblical mandate for leadership in the home includes serving, sacrificing, and selflessness. Students of Paul’s instruction on leadership in the home would do well to keep in mind Jesus’ words in Matthew 20:25: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. *It shall not be so among you.*” Leadership in the home is not meant to be the husband’s dictatorial leadership and power as sitting in a place of ruling authority, but rather of the defining characteristics of serving, sacrificing, and selflessness, as Christ taught and exemplified. Pastor Carey Nieuwhof reflects that, sadly, “if you don’t nurture your character daily, you can be most admired by the people who know you the least while the people who know you best struggle with you the most.”⁶⁷ This is why Christian leadership must focus on character, and a focus on character means, as Mohler writes, the “Christian leader is driven by gospel convictions and a passionate love for the church.”⁶⁸

The focus of leaders in a local church must not be directed only within the four walls of their church. Their strategy and vision must extend beyond the church into their first ministry: their family. Research seems to suggest that a focus on ministry at home is not necessarily happening or that it is difficult to manage for local church leaders. According to research done by the Fuller Institute, “33 percent [of pastors] say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family.”⁶⁹ Fifty-five percent of pastors admitted that evening and weekend work puts pressure on their family.⁷⁰ Paul lays out the priority

⁶⁷ Nieuwhof, *Didn’t See It Coming*, 41.

⁶⁸ *Essential Reading on Leadership* (Louisville: Southern Equip, 2018), 3.

⁶⁹ Fuller Institute of Church Growth, “1991 Survey of Pastors,” Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 199, quoted in H. B. London, Jr., and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who’ve Been There* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 20.

⁷⁰ John C. LaRue, Jr., “Pastors at Work: Where the Time Goes,” *Leadership Journal*, January 3, 2001, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2001/january-online-only/cln10103.html>.

of leadership in the home as a key qualification among others for pastors in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, saying that the pastor “must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” If the leader in the local church cannot lead his family, then how will he manage God’s family? Leaders must prioritize family first.

Unfortunately, studies show that the opposite is happening. Studies from Focus on the Family show that a meager 13 percent of pastors say that the first thing they schedule is time with family, and only 12 percent admit that their number one priority is their family.⁷¹ This must change, because there will come a day when the pastor is no longer working in a church and could have nowhere to go home to if he did not invest in his home base. Whether it is retirement, disability, a change of calling, or some other reason that a pastor is no longer leading in a local church, the fact remains that the leader always has a home to return to. Home life must be the primary and foundational ministry base for any leader in a local church. Brian Dyson, former COO of Coca-Cola, delivered the commencement speech at Georgia Tech in 1996. In this address he talked about how leaders juggle so many things:

Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them work, family, health, friends and spirit. And you’re keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls—family, health, friends and spirit—are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life.⁷²

To lead a family well, the leaders must be present with their family. This is not meant to suggest that a leader never works, in fact, just the opposite. When leaders are at

⁷¹ London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 216.

⁷² Rabieh Adib, “The 5 Balls of Life: Coca-Cola’s Ex-CEO Bryan Dyson’s Speech on Love, Work, Family, and Friendship,” March 8, 2016, <https://shinecoachingbarcelona.com/en/5-balls-of-life-brian-dyson-speech/>.

work, they ought to give it their all and be fully present. When they are at home, they should give home all of their undivided attention and be present with their family. But leaders will never be present with their family unless they personally make their family a priority. The moment that family is not a priority is the moment problems creep into the leader's life and ministry. And when problems are present at home, they will present themselves in other areas of leadership. Leaders are not as important as they might think, which should make being present easier.

A leader of character is a leader defined and driven by love. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians says that it is the love of Christ that compels believers to love others (2 Cor 5:14). It is clear from his letters that there is a strong emotional bond between Paul and the churches he led (2 Cor 12:14-15; Phil 1:3-8; 1 Thess 2:17-20). Granted, some, as Mohler reminds readers, “are more difficult to love than others, but the key to faithful ministry is not just pouring into the teachable and supportive, but pursuing those hard to love and seeking to win those who are cynical towards your ministry.”⁷³ Paul himself said that love is a necessity in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Leaders can develop daily disciplines, cultivate healthy and godly character, and lead well in the home, but the purpose of all of these disciplines, as Chris Webb writes, is “to create the perfect environment for love to flourish: a deep and abiding love of God, and a wholehearted, overflowing love for one another.”⁷⁴ The love and kindness of God draws sinners to repentance, and kindness of the redeemed should model the love of God. Paul, as a Christian leader, puts the interests and needs of those he leads above his own desires

⁷³ Mohler, *More Faithful Service*, 58.

⁷⁴ Chris Webb, *God Soaked Life: Discovering a Kingdom Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 131.

and agendas, exemplifying servant leadership in love. Selfish leaders are not loving leaders. Donald Miller suggests, “Leaders who think the story of life is all about them may achieve temporary successes but are usually remembered in history’s narrative as a villain.”⁷⁵

In the life and letters of Paul in the Epistles, leaders in the local church are able to catch a glimpse into healthy leadership in progress. Peter Scazzero, a pastor and author, manages to capture the tension of leading like Jesus when he writes, “The Church and the world desperately need leaders, but we will only make things worse if we don’t lead God’s way.”⁷⁶ Leading God’s way focuses on developing a life of character through self-care and discipline, and loving those we lead like Jesus. Taking his cues from Jesus, Paul provides a gift in defining Christian leadership and shaping what a great leader looks like. Influential leader and author J. Oswald Sanders argues, “True greatness, true leadership is found in giving yourself in service to others.”⁷⁷ To model Christian leadership after Paul’s life and teaching in the Epistles, leaders will find that, as Dumas and Stinson graciously write, “Gospel leadership isn’t hard and abrasive, it’s compassionate and gracious. . . . New Testament and biblical leadership: selfless sacrifice, up to the point of physically laying your life down for others.”⁷⁸ May leaders be the first to secure their oxygen masks to develop the character and life God calls them to so that they can lead well in love at both home and work.

Challenges Unique to Leaders

My ministry career has taken me to pastor in four states across the US and to the corners of the globe. Interestingly, each of the positions I have served throughout my fifteen years of ministry has been near a military base. Because of this, our family has

⁷⁵ Donald Miller, *Building a Story Brand* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 77.

⁷⁶ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 127.

⁷⁷ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 14.

⁷⁸ Stinson and Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*, 52.

been fortunate to grow close to some amazing families who serve in the armed forces. As much fun as I have had training in tactical defense with a Navy Seal officer, nothing compared to the conversations I had with the strategic and operational commander with the 101st Airborne Division of Fort Campbell. This leader sends the call to go and defend an area or attack another location. He calls in the strikes, writes the battle plan for a troop, and creates the military strategy for this Army division. He has shared story after story of amazing bravery with men and women of the United States Army defending the freedoms of the US. He also talks in great depth of how much effort and manpower is put into defending their command and control centers on the battlefield, relaying the powerful principle that the best way to defeat an army is to attack the core of their command and control. In much the same way, from a spiritual battle standpoint, the enemy knows that the way to stop a church in its tracks is to attack its leadership. Pastors are not neutral observers, safe behind the stained glass windows—they are often in the same predicament, dealing with mental health issues, struggling with anxiety and depression, isolated and lonely, strained in their marriages and relationships, and flirting with dangerous addictions. However, leaders in the local church are also in a unique position of the enemy’s attacks and arrows fired from within the four walls of their church family.

Paul knew that pastors in the local church were going to experience challenges particular to their calling, which is why he wrote the trustworthy saying, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim 3:1). As he is encouraging and instructing the young pastor, Paul reminds Timothy that a pastor does good work, but that work can be a daunting task that others do not experience. John Calvin comments, “It is no light matter to represent God’s son, in such a great task as erecting and extending God’s Kingdom, in caring for the salvation of souls whom the Lord Himself has designed

to purchase with His own blood, and in ruling the Church which is God's inheritance."⁷⁹ Many pastors walk up on an elevated stage to speak for an extended amount of time about an eternal subject matter to which is life and death. While speaking, an entire crowd typically listens in relative silence. Not only does this leader preach truth, but he is expected to live a life that reflects the change brought about by the gospel he preaches about. Leaders are held in high regard, and Paul says this is a good and noble task, but as David Dickson writes, "The office and work being spiritual, it is necessary that elders should be spiritual men. It is not necessary that they be men of great gifts or world position, of wealth or high education; but it is indispensably necessary that they be men of God, at peace with him, new creatures in Christ Jesus."⁸⁰

Paul continues to inform of the minimal requirements and standards for leaders in the church:

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:2-7)

Paul knows that the devil is on the prowl and looking to defeat churches' kingdom work, so he gives the biblical pattern for a life well lived. Denny Burk writes that these leaders "must be mature in their faith and must have exemplary character and family life,"⁸¹ knowing that in their position, leaders are targeted more. Burk continues, "Pastors cannot

⁷⁹ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. T.A. Smail, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 222.

⁸⁰ David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work*, ed. George Kennedy McFarland and Philip Graham Ryken (1883; repr. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 30.

⁸¹ Denny Burk, *Ephesians-Philemon*, *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 11 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 403.

teach what they cannot do. They cannot—with credibility—stand before God’s people and tell them what they ought to be and to do if they themselves are not what God has told them to be and to do. And this is why the baseline qualification for ministry is exemplary character.”⁸² Paul was not the only one who noticed and noted the unique challenges to those in leadership positions. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:17, hearkening back to Ezekiel 9:6, that judgement begins at the household of God. Jared Wilson writes, “If judgment begins at the house of God, it would stand to reason that judgment of the house of God begins with those in authority. With the double honor of 1 Timothy 5:17 is the double responsibility of James 3:1.”⁸³

James continues the truth that leaders should be living examples when he warns, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:1). Lest the reader think that James is suggesting that nobody should teach, James is simply giving caution to those in the church who do teach. Knowing and even admitting that “all stumble in many ways” (Jas 3:2), James recognizes that the mantle of leadership is different for pastors. Jesus even warns of judgement for those in authority who use their leadership influence incorrectly: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt 18:6). Church members are not positionally placed in the situations, under the lights, and by the call of God in the spots of pastors. While all Christians face common struggles, temptations, and challenges, leaders in particular are challenged in unique ways.

In conducting interviews as research for this project, a common thread for leaders who thrived and those who did not survive in ministry was the presence of

⁸² Burk, *Ephesians-Philemon*, 407.

⁸³ Jared C. Wilson, *The Pastor’s Justification: Applying the Work of Christ in Your Life and Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 29.

discouragement, exhaustion, and frustration—discouragement from a ministry idea that does not work or a sermon that felt like it fell on deaf ears; exhaustion of the pace of ministry and the expectations of the church family; frustration from church members bent on complaining about the most worthless and menial things. However, the difference between those interviewed who thrived and those who simply did not survive was whether they went through these struggles alone or with others. Henri Nouwen writes an entire book on the reality that pastors are wounded healers.⁸⁴ Leaders suffer just like every other Christian does, yet God has called pastors to a unique role and responsibility that is not present with others.

NASA had made giant leaps in the space program through years of sending manned space flights into orbit and onto the moon. By the mid 1980s, confidence within the space program reached new heights, leading NASA to select a schoolteacher to join a crew of astronauts on the space shuttle *Challenger*. Confident in their training, teams of scientists and engineers placed Christa McAuliffe in a shuttle bound to leave Earth's atmosphere. In the 1980s, schoolteachers were not experiencing life like astronauts did. In fact, a very small minority of people experienced the position in which NASA astronauts got to live.

For leaders in the local church, while they are not astronauts by any stretch of the imagination, they are required to live in different arenas and experience different challenges. Ministry can be messy at times, often not having set work hours to balance with time off. Crises do not wait to occur for a convenient moment in the leader's schedule. Needs arise that are not planned or wanted. Insecurities befall leaders who put their worth and value in the response or praise of men. Armed with this knowledge, leaders must work in unique ways to prevent failure and protect healthy boundaries so that thriving for decades becomes normative.

⁸⁴ Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

Conclusion

The type of gospel leadership required in Scripture is a simple way of life. However, it is far from easy in execution in the life of the leader. The temptation may arise to oversimplify the mandate to live differently and qualify the necessity of perfection in the life of a leader. Dayton Hartman in his convicting work *Lies Pastors Believe*, writes, “Here is the scandalous truth of the gospel: Jesus doesn’t redeem achievers; he only redeems failures. God the Father doesn’t exclusively love winners but losers.”⁸⁵ While pastors are not expected to be perfect, biblical qualifications set the standard for leaders in the local church. This is not to say that pastors will not have bad weeks, but a bad week is different from a bad year. A few bad months are radically different from a few bad years. There will be moments of a lapse in judgement, times that sin makes leaders irrational, and brokenness will become present. But the gospel gives leaders freedom even in failure because the gospel accepts people in spite of their failures. Scripture encourages leaders in their journey to pursue a holy life in wholeness while pursuing the one true and holy God.

⁸⁵ Dayton Hartman, *Lies Pastors Believe: 7 Ways to Elevate Yourself, Subvert the Gospel, and Undermine the Church* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 34.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL PLACES TO START IN SURVIVING LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Growing up in Tennessee, there were not any opportunities for me to learn how to surf. I had seen surfing on television, heard stories of my uncle surfing off the coast of Florida, but had never actually attempted surfing until I lived in California. I stepped onto my first surfboard in the calm waters of Dana Point Harbor and learned the peaceful rhythms of Stand-Up paddle boarding. Enjoying a nice paddle around the harbor was simple enough and never once resulted in me getting wet or falling into the ocean. There were no waves to victimize me and only a minimal number of people shared the salty waters of an interior harbor. After several weeks of mastering a paddle around an approximate one-mile stretch, a friend invited me out into the waves to surf my stand-up paddle board. Later that week, I met him in a grocery store parking lot to drive over to San Onofre State Beach, just a few minutes from our home in San Clemente, California. I knew enough to know where to stand on the board, how to turn the surfboard in the direction I wanted it to go, and generally how waves worked. My friend and impromptu surf instructor explained in less than 90 seconds how I could catch a wave before confirming that I could swim. After affirming and taking the required Instagram photo that I was self-convinced would communicate to my friends and family back home in Tennessee that I was officially rad, we carried our boards down the shore to the frigid waters of the Pacific Ocean. To our immediate South was San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant, a dormant yet hotly debated facility among locals. To our North was a mass of skilled surfers on short boards who were performing jumps, turns, and tricks that I pictured myself doing in a matter of minutes. As I paddled out, a small fin crested a wave as a

group of dolphins made their way past. It was the picture-perfect day that marked the beginning of my surf career.

I powered through the initial waves crashing down on my board while laying on my chest. As I continued out toward the line-up, I followed the path my friend was taking, only feeling the cool water on my hands and feet while being protected by a borrowed wet suit. I not only felt the part this day, but I looked legitimate too. That day was described by the surf report that I conveniently googled the night before as a mid-wave day, meaning that the waves were not massive and dangerous, yet they were not muted and mild. I met the first four to six-foot wave face first as it became the king of the hill immediately by knocking me off of my board. Luckily, I had strapped the surfboard securely around my ankle and only had to swim about six feet to recover my golden Laird Hamilton twelve-and-a-half-foot long surfboard. Reassuring myself that this is simply a learning phase, I leisurely swam back to the board, began to climb back aboard when I turned to see the second wave in the six-foot set crashing down on me like an avalanche. Because the wave fell directly onto me, it brought the brunt force of a freight train onto my sprawled-out body that was previously attempting to mount the surfboard. When I went under water, I immediately felt the continued force of the wave that not only pushed me deeper into the ocean but began to suck me into a resurging tidal wave undercurrent. As a wearer of contact lenses and an amateur surfer,¹ I made the snap decision to not open my eyes to get a visual assessment of my current state in the depth of California's Pacific Ocean. Instead, I began to feverishly fight to swim to the surface. After what felt like minutes, I resurfaced thanks to the assistance of the buoyant surfboard. What was once thought of as a sports device that would catapult me into a newly transplanted cultural phenom quickly became a life saving device that would prevent an early departure from this world. The conditions that made for an incredible day on the water for my

¹ I admit that this is a grossly overstated assessment of my novice surfing skills that will soon be revealed to be at the absolute lowest point possible.

friend became the conditions that pummeled me continuously for three more waves, leading to the point in my life where I genuinely thought, “this is how it ends.” Each wave crashed on me harder than before, submitting me to the vicious undercurrent below, forcing me to violently swim to the surface in an attempt to circumvent a certain and sure death. My life saving measures added stress and anxiety mentally to my overwhelmed physical body. The final wave crashed onto me and my board, catapulting my board directly into the crown of my head.² After fighting to come above water, begging for a break in the tidal set, I resurfaced and exhaustedly crawled back onto my board and continued paddling out past the wave break and sat on my board, my body physically and my mind emotionally spent.

While many pastors have not had the opportunity to learn how to surf like this Tennessee pastor has, many pastors have very real experience being pummeled by the waves of life, punished by the pains of ministry, and left feeling like ministry demise is a foregone conclusion. There are times when these fatal waves of ministry are the result of paddling into dangerous territory and a hardness of heart toward sin. Often as a result of allowing or inviting respectable sins into one’s life quietly and minimally, sin has a way of blinding human beings to the reality of the danger posed. These moments and seasons when leaders give in to the undercurrent of sin, they eventually slip into irrational behavior. But this behavior can be prevented. In Ori Brafman and Rom Brafman’s practical research, they show that “when we understand how these and a host of other mysterious forces operate, one thing becomes certain: whether we’re a head of state or a college football coach, a love-struck student or a venture capitalist, we’re all susceptible to the irresistible pull of irrational behavior.”³ There are, however, times where leaders

² Spoiler alert! I survived. If you have read this far and found yourself gasping for air and your rate of breathing increased, welcome to my first experience of surfing.

³ Ori Brafman and Rom Brafman, *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 17.

genuinely and passionately enter the waters of ministry to be completely blindsided by the weight of leadership, and responsibility, and the opportunity that ministry brings. Ori and Rom Brafman suggest that “a growing body of research reveals that our behavior and decision making are influenced by an array of such psychological undercurrents and that they are much more powerful and pervasive than most of us realize.”⁴ While many pastors may not have surfed, they have been faced with the reality of the waves of ministry and the tides of life that come crashing down on them. As shown in chapter 1, leadership in the local church can be defeating, demoralizing, and a ministry destroying reality.

Ministry is difficult. Yes, this is a wild oversimplification that does not fully capture the depth of difficulty that comes with ministry. Simplicity though, does capture the wide range of difficulty ministry offers. It is not just difficult because of the rise of multiple constant news outlets with a refreshing cycle of demise. It is not simply difficult because of the rise of news anchors and cultural commentators by way of a smart phone and social media. Ministry and leadership were hard even in biblical times. Gideon was thrust into the leadership of a much smaller army than any general would feel comfortable marching out onto the battlefield (Judg 7). David succeeded his self-imploding predecessor as King of Israel (2 Sam 2:1-7). Jesus, although he perfectly executed how leaders lead difficult and at times incompetent teams, led a challenging and onerous group of disciples (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 4:35-41 among other references). Ministry also is not difficult because of a lack of training or preparation. While I did not know what I was getting into that morning when I parked my car at Ralph’s and took a ride to our surfing destination, there are times when pastors and leaders just cannot prepare for some of the difficulties faced in ministry. No amount of seminary training,⁵ intentional mentorships, or reading in books will prepare leaders for absolutely everything that

⁴ Brafman and Brafman, *Sway*, 16.

⁵ Although my time at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary prepared me in many ways and to the best that any seminary can offer.

leading in a local church will bring. However, there are certain practical places to start when building a life that will survive leadership. Brafman and Brafman again bear light and write that “it is only by recognizing and understanding the hidden world of sways that we can hope to weaken their influence and curb their power over our thinking and our lives.”⁶

Leaks in Leadership

When my family moved into our home in Southern California, after a couple of months living there, we noticed a small drop of water on the floor near the washing machine. Not thinking too much about why, we wiped up the spot and continued life as usual. Several months later, we noticed a small collection of water in the garage, then noticed minimal water pooling in the kitchen. It was not until months after that we noticed a slow stream of water from the front door going to the front driveway. In similar fashion, sin can creep in and destroy. This is a way that leaders who have not survived leadership in the local church have eventually fallen. It starts with a pinhole and leads out into the public. What if someone pulled up the internet history on the laptops of local church leaders, their tablet, or smart device? What if someone accessed the history from the router to see exactly what sites were visited. What if a leader’s spouse had full access to their credit card spending, or church members had access to their leader’s purchasing card? Imagine if those embarrassing details about social media conversations or accounts leaders follow became published. The reality is that a leader’s sins, even the “respectable” sins that are culturally overlooked,⁷ or those secret sins, are in reality open scandal in Heaven. The Psalmist writes, “You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence” (Ps 90:8). There are times where the secret sins even become

⁶ Brafman and Brafman, *Sway*, 181.

⁷ Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007).

an open scandal here on Earth, wreaking havoc on families, marriages, children, and local churches.

What measures can leaders take to ensure that the pinhole leaks do not become a flood of debilitating problems that destroy the potential to lead long term? One of the great places to start is by knowing and leading yourself.

After finishing the morning surfing, I told my friend that I had a blast and was already looking forward to the next “sesh.” Denial is not just a river in Egypt, and leaders cannot continue to deny the presence of difficulty in leadership within local churches. Pastors cannot continue to act as if there is no problem of secret sin, or that leaders do not get pummeled under the weight of leadership and sin. Leaders in the local church must move forward on addressing the difficulty so that we can stop the bleeding of leaders in the local church.

The past couple of years has seen a rise in the popularity of Escape Rooms around the United States. The concept, for those not familiar, is that a group of people who are reasonably well acquainted voluntarily lock themselves into a room filled with subtle clues, mysterious puzzles, and equations to solve in less than one hour. Multiple riddles must be solved in the course of one hour to unlock the final clue, which unlocks the door to the exit. Millions around the country have subjected themselves to this as a form of entertainment, even paying large sums of money to do so. Generations past would marvel and even laugh at the thought of leveraging finances to be locked up in a room with family and friends. Yet, many people and many leaders willingly submit themselves to the same thing personally by walking through the doors of a locked room of sin and secret desires. This life was one that Peter reminded his readers was one believers can and have escaped thanks to the gospel. This life in Christ is not one that simply follows some “cleverly devised myths” (2 Pet 1:16), but rather the experiences that Peter himself had in his work with Jesus. In his second letter, Peter writes,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has

granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Pet 1:3-15)

For Christmas, our 8-year-old daughter, Addy, got a brand-new bike. She had wanted a new bike for quite some time. She wanted to switch from the pedal brakes system of a children's bike to the hand brake system. Having the ability to change gears on her bicycle became a talking point in her convincing argument that she needed a new bike. While the upgraded features were a nice inclusion, we got her a bicycle for Christmas due to the fact that her old bike was too small. However, just one week after Christmas, Addy asked me to dig out her old bicycle. I was shocked on many levels. She spent months crafting her arguments in the defense of her necessity of a new bicycle. The old bicycle was faded, the white tires worn from many brake check burnouts with her brother, Bauer, and the basket was barely hanging on by a dirty Band-Aid. On top of that, her old bicycle did not have the features that she begged to have every time she was forced to continue using her deficient two-wheeled entertainment device. Although I was never able to extract her reasoning for wanting to dust off the old bike, I do know that the tendency to return to the old is something woven into the lives of everyone with a heartbeat. It was woven throughout the Israelites who preferred slavery in Egypt to the journey toward the promised land (Exod 16:3). Peter reminds the early followers of Christ that the lifestyle, choices, and direction of their former life cannot be the patterns of their new life because of God's great power at work within them. Through Christ and the faith that his followers

have attained (1 Pet 1:1-2), the escape room door has been blown off of the hinges. Because of this, Peter exhorts believers to do everything they possibly can to supplement their faith, not to remain in Christ, but to live like Christ. In other words, leaders must protect the link between the portrait painted of life lived in the gospel and the life lived in the individual person. Peter immediately invokes a life of high moral standard by supplementing faith with virtue (1 Pet 1:13). This life of a leader is a life of virtue. C. S. Lewis says, “Virtue and vice are not simply passive indicators of character; it turns out that they are also active predictors of future character.”⁸

Peter then moves from virtue and continues to build on the life well lived by adding knowledge, growing in what believers know and adding to their bank of wisdom (1 Pet 2:2). With wisdom comes self-control. Peter does not stop with just knowing the truth, but logically implies that knowledge leads to discipline. If leaders want to thrive instead of simply working to survive, they must be disciplined. Discipline is the difference between average and abundance in life and leadership. Leaders may well be able to articulate their values, but they will be nothing more than sweet-sounding words unless leaders actually practices the behaviors that help them live out a gospel life, effectively bridging the 18-inch gap discussed in chapter 2. Peter continues developing the life of a gospel-minded leader by stating the value of self-control with perseverance and commitment, and perseverance with godliness (1 Pet 1:14). If leaders want to cultivate this life that survives the tests, trials, and temptations of leadership, then they must build on this very foundation that Peter outlines starting with faith in Christ. A leader in the local church must start with Christ as the driving force of the life well lived. That leader must then strive to reflect the character of Christ in virtuous living. Intentionality then carries the leader in their learning, which requires discipline and self-control. This self-control is not seasonal, but rather incessantly strives with deep commitment toward

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Virtue and Vice: A Dictionary of the Good Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), vii.

godliness. Godliness builds a community with other believers through self-denying love toward others.

Our two kids enjoy playing outside, exploring new ideas, and being together. They are also both highly creative and their imagination leads them to dream up an ever-growing list of things to entertain themselves. Whenever they play and operate based on pre-determined rules and games, things tend to lean toward smooth operation. When games are created, rules are altered, or ideas put into action in the beta phase, World War III is the likeliest of outcomes as their self-designed game dissolves into argument. As my wife and I worked with them to help them see the difficulty caused by a burdensome list of unknown and unnecessary rules, I began to see the personal and professional life parallel. The disciplines explored in the coming pages are not meant to be a comprehensive guide to leadership survival or even a burdensome list of rules. What is meant to be a practical outworking of principles is not intended to be a burden or red tape around the perfectly manicured green on a golf course. When anyone starts to feel the overwhelming burden of certain practices in their life that are intended to be helpful, it is probably time to evaluate their place in their life and original purpose of discipline.

The Leader in the Local Church Can Build This Life Out Practically

Emotional intelligence has emerged as a key indicator of health and ability of leaders in any organization. It has been closely connected to both personal and professional success. Emotional Intelligence according to Travis Bradberry is “your ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships.”⁹ However, emotional intelligence is far from a new concept. John Calvin explains, “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of

⁹ Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (San Diego: TalentSmart, 2009), 17.

God.”¹⁰ Socrates once said as he was on trial for impiety and corruption of youth, “an unexamined life is not worth living.” The recent focus on emotional intelligence and health is critical because “without self-awareness—an understanding of who you are, what you feel, and why you do the things you do—you will not be emotionally healthy.”¹¹ This means that to some degree, emotionally speaking, Michael Jackson was helpful when he sang the encouragement to start with the “Man in the Mirror.” The leader who does not know himself can be a dangerous guide. In fact, Clay Scroggins attributes a lack of self-awareness and emotional intelligence and awareness as the number one reason leaders do not survive.¹² Leaders must be the ones driving the monster truck that crashes into the depths of who they are. Leaders must become students of themselves, not for vanity’s sake, but for the sake of self-leadership and self-knowledge.

My dad is an incredible grandfather who my kids affectionately refer to as Poppie. Poppie is adored by five grandkids: Rex, Addy, Bauer, Gracie Kate, and Nash. His grandkids love him for the same reasons that those who call him Dad do. My dad is the first one to stop what he is doing, important or trivial, to crawl down onto the floor to play with the grandkids, just like he was when I was growing up. Poppie is compassionate, kind, and caring, and his grandkids feel the love of Jesus through the love of their Poppie. One of Poppie’s favorite things to do is make his grandkids laugh, although he has been doing that since I was a kid. He is energized by the laughter of his family. Like most dads, he has a plethora of “Dad Jokes” that he can share at any time. One of his favorites is to put his glasses on the top of his head, resting them in the soft gray hair that accompanies the depth of wisdom that Solomon says comes from living a godly life (Prov 16:31). He

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1:35.

¹¹ Clay Scroggins, *How to Lead in a World of Distractions: Four Simple Habits for Turning Down the Noise* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 81.

¹² Scroggins, *How to Lead in a World of Distractions*, 82.

places his glasses on the top of his head and then goes around to each of the grandkids asking “Where did I put my glasses? I can’t find my glasses anywhere, have you seen them?” The children all laugh hysterically as they point out what is obvious, “Poppie, your glasses are up there on your head!” This of course does not stop him from continuing his rounds with the kids, repeating the same question jokingly as he attempts to hold back his own smile and laughter.

In much the same way, but without the intentionality and humor, many leaders have no clue about the way they act, the behaviors they display, or the leadership type they embody. Leaders with no self-awareness, measuring a zero on the emotional intelligence scale, and lacking the desire to do the self-reflection required to grow in emotional health and intelligence, wreak havoc on the organizations and individuals they recklessly lead. Wayne Cordeiro refers to this as the tragic flaw of leadership: “A tragic flaw of many leaders is that they cannot recognize their limits or acknowledge their need for others as the demands of work or ministry scale up dramatically.”¹³ Everyone else sees the leader’s blind spots and can clearly see the remnants of chocolate cake on their face. While my dad knows both himself and where his glasses are, many leaders suffer from a great deficiency of a lack of emotional awareness and intelligence. Self-awareness is not just knowing yourself; it is also being aware of how other people see you. Problems in leadership arise when there is a difference between how the leader sees himself or herself and how others see that leader. When talking about self-awareness in leadership, Ruth Haley Barton says, “One of the downsides of visionary leadership is that we can get our signs set on something that is so far out in the future that we miss what’s going on in our life as it exists now. We are blind to the bush that is burning in our own backyard and

¹³ Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 9.

the wisdom that is contained within it.”¹⁴ That is why leaders who not only survive, but who thrive, are leaders who are highly self-aware. Being self-aware is simply knowing who you really are. Self-aware leaders know the strengths, weaknesses, blind spots, stress points, and other areas of what makes them unique. Barton continues, “A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what’s going on inside him- or herself, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.”¹⁵ This self-evaluation and self-awareness is crucial to leading in a healthy way for the long term. If a leader does not take the internal look and do the hard work of discerning who he or she is internally, then that leader can do more harm than good. Pastor and author Peter Scazzero links internal and external leadership when he writes, “If we fail to recognize that who we are on the inside informs every aspect of our leadership, we will do damage to ourselves and to those we lead.”¹⁶ One of the places leaders get into the most trouble is in their lack of self-awareness.

Taking an internal look is not a quick process, nor is it a process that can be done individually. Understanding who you are, what makes you react or respond in certain ways, and how you come across to those you lead is a process that takes a deep dive into your internal wiring and the source of the feelings. Many leaders start with an assessment like the Enneagram, Strengths Finder, Myers Briggs, or other instruments as a starting place to help identify and reveal internal wirings, personalities, or tendencies.¹⁷ These helpful tools can begin the journey of self-assessment. Assessment tools assist in

¹⁴ Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 63.

¹⁵ Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 38.

¹⁶ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 48.

¹⁷ The Enneagram Institute, “The Riso-Huson Enneagram Type Indicator,” accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/rheti>; Gallup, “Clifton StrengthsFinder,” accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/strengthsfinder.aspx>; Myers & Briggs Foundation, “Take the MBTI Instrument,” accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/take-the-mbti-instrument/>.

providing an objective look inside the mind and heart of a leader. While these tools are not designed to dissect each individual leader's wiring, they do provide a launch pad into self-assessment. When leaders are more self-aware, even if only through these self-assessments, they begin to grow in the ability to respond in situations instead of reacting to them. Drew Bird writes,

The emotionally effective leader is one who has a high emotional intelligence quotient. They are able to understand themselves, what they believe, and who they are as a leader. What is more is that they can understand and connect with others. They can empathize, understand, and communicate with the people around them, making them more effective as a leader, while also impacting the effectiveness of those they lead.¹⁸

To ignore the issue of emotional intelligence or the need to develop self-awareness is akin to Californian's ignoring the drought. For decades, the state of California has been in a state of emergency due to drought. When my family arrived in California from Tennessee, all of the new neighbor literature mentioned water conservation and urged only the absolute necessary usage of water. It only took a few days for us to realize that absolutely no one in Southern California observes the warnings about water usage and the drought. No doubt, thousands of dollars are spent on promotional materials, signage, and commercial marketing. But as much talk about the drought as there is, swimming pools are fully filled, lawns are vibrant and green from a daily watering, and there is no real practice of water conservation. This is similar to the way leaders who lack self-awareness lead. Scazzero teaches, "When we devote ourselves to reaching the world for Christ while ignoring our own emotional and spiritual health, our leadership is shortsighted at best."¹⁹ For leaders in the local church to lead with the long game in mind, they must begin to take a deep dive into building self-awareness. Know yourself, know your leadership, your voice, and know your heart. A growing self-awareness brings with

¹⁸ Drew Bird, *The Leaders Guide to Emotional Intelligence: Understand and Develop Your EQ for Maximum Leadership Impact* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent, 2016), 41.

¹⁹ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 27.

it benefits both professionally and personally. Self-aware leaders are better able to identify the triggers to ministry frustration that cause them to go nuclear in a frustrating situation. A highly emotionally aware leader is able to recognize the signs of burn-out long before the resignation. Self-awareness also brings the ability to navigate the stressful seasons of leadership without succumbing to unhealthy escapes. Stress, burnout, and frustration do not have to bring an end to a ministry career or the beginning of a career outside the church. There exists a tension in stress that brings out a healthy stress or a toxic stress. Leaders who are highly self-aware and emotionally intelligent have the unique ability to navigate stress in a healthy way, knowing the internal triggers and potential shadow sides of their leadership so that they lead in a healthy way even in stressful seasons. Scott Sauls writes, “My heart makes noise. My inner life is a paradox of comfort and accusation, inner rest and inner restlessness, enjoyment of God’s grace and despair at my own lack of grace, awareness of my completion in Christ and knowledge of feeling incomplete.”²⁰ The leader who lacks this necessary self-awareness and emotional intelligence is constantly leading in a state of emotional and spiritual deficit. They lack what Scazzero refers to as the “emotional maturity and a ‘being with God’ sufficient to sustain their ‘doing for God.’”²¹ Cordeiro captures this tension of being both human and Christ follower succinctly: “We don’t forget that we are Christians. We forget that we are human, and that one oversight alone can debilitate the potential of our future.”²² When I am able to lead myself, I am able to self-regulate and self-communicate to myself so that I can lead myself well, and this only comes through knowing myself.

So, how can leaders grow in emotional awareness and intelligence? It starts with working toward a healthy and robust self-awareness that leads to an ability to self-

²⁰ Scott Sauls, *From Weakness to Strength: 8 Vulnerabilities That Can Bring Out the Best in Your Leadership* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2017), 112.

²¹ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 25.

²² Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty*, 13.

manage in a myriad of situations. That progress toward a high level of social awareness lends itself toward a greater relationship management at home and in the church. Growing in these areas requires more than just assessments. It requires an intentional pursuit of being known by others, through accountability partners, coaches, and counselors. In this pursuit, they are able to speak into the leader's life, leadership, blind spots, and past hurts. Growth requires a plan for soul care and spiritual development coupled with the discipline to pursue the plan. Finally, growing in emotional awareness and emotional intelligence requires boundaries that protect and prevent burnout, immorality, and calling creep²³ that will keep leaders in the local church in ministry for the long term.

Soul Care and Spiritual Disciplines

Leadership in the local church is full of serving. Serving could involve meeting with people in the darkest and most desperate hours of their life on earth through the unimaginable loss of a child, the news of an affair, the loss of a job, or the financial ruin of a lifelong accrual of debt. Serving involves working with others whose marriage has begun a meltdown in an effort to point out biblical principles of restoration and recovery to them. There is a constant and consistent pouring out of the life, service, and soul of a leader in the local church that if paired with an absence of pouring in will leave the leader burned out and empty.

I recently took a day trip to Catalina Island, a small channel island off of the coast of Southern California once owned by the chewing gum magnate and the namesake of arguably the most historic Major League Baseball Park, William Wrigley, Jr. While there are several ways to get to Catalina Island, including by helicopter or shuttle boat ferry, I took the forty-one-mile trek on the twenty-foot Boston Whaler fishing boat bouncing and knocking the entire two hours. When I boarded my friend's boat, I did not

²³ *Calling creep* can encompass a wide range of things that vary leader to leader. *Creep* refers to that thing, that role, that responsibility that assumes a place into the leadership of any particular person that is not a part of their God-given purpose and calling.

know what to expect, nor did I know what was in store. As we set sail from the Dana Point Harbor, the analytical side of my brain began developing scenarios that included being stranded in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on a fishing boat, surviving weeks off of canned food and primal fishing methods that would later become a blockbuster hit film. Of course, none of that actually happened, because we safely returned back to the mainland of California after a day at sea. We did, however, need to utilize the gas station on the semi-remote island to make the full trip both there to Catalina Island and back. In leadership, there are many connections to the lengthy journey of leading well for the long term. However, it is impossible to lead well for the length of a career if leaders do not consistently revisit the fueling station to fill up the gas tank. It would be foolish to have set sail for an eighty-two-mile round trip journey in a small fishing boat expecting the on-board fuel tank to be sufficient for the entire trip. In fact, that is a sure way to burn out of fuel and be stranded, but instead of becoming the storyline on the big screen, it would be a screen shot on America's Funniest Home Videos. When it comes to leadership, one of the ways to prevent this burnout and survive in leadership long term is by taking care of the soul. Cordeiro suggests that "to finish strong, you must learn to rejuvenate your spirit early in your ministry."²⁴ If leaders want to invest in people in a healthy way, they have to learn to invest in themselves in a healthy way. From gasoline to electric vehicles, there comes a time when they need to be refueled or charged. There is not a vehicle that will take a person an infinite number of miles without being filled up. The same is true in leadership. Pastor and organizational leadership expert Jeff Henderson coaches, "in order to breathe healthy life into the organization, you must ensure you're breathing it in first. The best gift you can give your customers, your team, and your community is an inspired, rejuvenated, fully alive you."²⁵

²⁴ Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty*, 33.

²⁵ Jeff Henderson, *Know What You're For: A Growth Strategy for Work, an Even Better Strategy for Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 29.

Proper soul care starts with a proper foundation of self-knowledge. Knowing the things that fill each individual leader's soul is as essential as knowing what types of fuel their vehicle requires: diesel, gasoline, or electricity. Leaders do not have to search the world over in hopes of finding the one size fits all approach to soul care. Christian psychiatrist and author of *Anatomy of the Soul* Curt Thompson writes, "There's no one right framework for the soul. What's important is that you have a framework and that it makes you more like Jesus."²⁶ While the framework will be unique and personalized with each leader, a biblical framework starts with a foundation of biblical spiritual disciplines. Donald Whitney defines these as "practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times."²⁷ Disciplines such as intake of Scripture, meditation and memorization of Scripture, prayer, evangelism, fellowship, fasting, silence and solitude, and worship are essential in the life of a believer and necessary for the leader in a local church. Barton says that the most important task for a spiritual leader to do each day is to do whatever it takes to seek God in the depths of their own soul.²⁸ Seek God, at minimum daily, in His Word so that when temptation comes, when frustration comes, and when burnout comes knocking, you have to step over mounds and mounds of Scripture to give in to these things. If leaders in the local church want to engage in sustainable and successful ministry, it can only be fruitful, as Henri Nouwen suggests, "If it grows out of a direct and intimate encounter with our Lord."²⁹ A ministry devoid of Scripture intake, meditation, and memorization is

²⁶ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Chicago: Tyndale House, 2010), 261.

²⁷ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

²⁸ Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 30.

²⁹ Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 21.

like attempting a swan dive in a kiddie pool. While it is possible,³⁰ it is not sustainable or even logical. Studies have shown that pastors can easily slip into a faulty mindset that the attention they receive for being a spiritual leader is a replacement for the pursuit of spiritual maturity.³¹ Ministry must be dependent on Bible intake for leadership in the local church to be survivable long term. Prayer must also be a constant well that is drawn from in the life of a leader. David Mathis writes that, in providing wisdom and insight around the spiritual discipline of prayer, “without prayer, there is no true relationship with him, and no deep delight in who he is, but only glimpses from afar.”³² Prayer is not to be viewed and used like a vending machine, where leaders approach it with quarters in hand to press the buttons needed to receive the outcome they paid for through prayer. Pastor Carey Nieuwhof is quick to remind Christians that “prayer is not a button to be pushed, it’s a relationship to be pursued.”³³ The potential for problem arises when leaders attempt to fill their mind with ideas of God while their heart is removed and far from God. Prayer keeps the heart close to the heart of God. With prayer and Scripture intake, then comes the need for moments and seasons of silence and solitude. Continuing to unpack the *Habits of Grace*, Mathis writes, “You need a break from the chaos, from the noise and the crowds, more than you may think at first. You need the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude.”³⁴

³⁰ Erik Malinowski, “‘Professor Splash’ Sets World Record for High Dive into Shallow Pool,” March 18, 2011, <https://www.wired.com/2011/03/professor-splash-world-record/>.

³¹ The Barna Group, *The State of Pastors: How Today’s Faith Leaders are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2017), 31.

³² David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 107.

³³ Carey Nieuwhof, *Didn’t See It Coming: Overcoming the Seven Greatest Challenges That No One Expects and Everyone Experiences* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2018), 194.

³⁴ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 137.

After being in ministry for more than a decade, I was offered an opportunity to spend a week on a ranch in Montana, at the foot of Trappers Peak. Not only had I never visited Montana, I had also never been on a soul care retreat. The packet of information detailing the events of the week I was to spend in Montana had about as much information as the microwave instructions included with a box of Pop-Tarts.³⁵ Needless to say, I did not know fully what to expect. I brought my hiking shoes, Bible, a notebook and fountain pen, and boarded one of the two flights available to Missoula, Montana. The week there in Montana completely shaped my life in a way I have never experienced, through extended time of silence and solitude by providing me the opportunity to get away from the busyness of ministry, the demands of a growing church, and the never-ending requests for meetings. I had become so busy that I was blinded by the busyness of my life and leadership and did not know how deeply I needed an extended period of silence and solitude. Pastor and author Kevin DeYoung writes, “The greatest danger with busyness is that there may be greater dangers you never have time to consider.”³⁶ Humans were not meant to live life in a twenty-four-hour availability cycle of endless noise. It is not that I was doing anything even overtly or blatantly sinful, but often times it is not the enormous heresy or apostasy that could show leaders in the local church the door. It can simply be the day to day worries of life. Balancing the homework that kids bring from school with the groceries that need to be bought. The need to be in two places at once, getting the tires rotated and water heater replaced. Leaders still have to maintain the mundane even in the midst of stress that others who are not in leadership positions do not have to manage. The reality of busyness was not burgeoning in my heart, and that meant I was slowly

³⁵ Take the pop tart out of the pouch and place it on a microwave-safe dish. Heat it on high for 3 seconds. Let it cool for a few seconds before eating it.

³⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A Mercifully Short Book About a Really Big Problem Behavior* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 31-32.

decaying at the core of my soul. It was not persecution or famine that was defeating me, it was busyness. And this busyness, DeYoung warns, “kills more Christians than bullets.”³⁷

Dallas Willard, philosopher and writer on spiritual formation, explains,

What we need is a deeper insight into our practical relationship with God in redemption. We need an understanding that can guide us into constant interaction with the Kingdom of God as a real part of our daily lives, an ongoing spiritual presence that is at the same time a psychological reality. In other words, we must develop a psychologically sound theology of the spiritual life and of its disciplines to guide us.³⁸

Leaders who survive are leaders who strive for soul care and personal spiritual disciplines that thrive so that their public leadership reflects their private discipleship.

Leaders in the local church may be reading this with wishful thinking, wanting to go back in time to the season where they were not burned out. If a leader has reached the point of burn out, it is not too late to begin the process of caring for the soul. However, leaders should know that this process of rebuilding will take exponentially longer. Leaders in the local church cannot simply write it off. They certainly cannot give up! The engine that is destroyed is an engine that can be rebuilt. One of the many benefits of soul care and personal spiritual disciplines is they provide the healthy, safe, and appropriate outlets to prevent the burned-out leader from being susceptible to dysfunctional, unhealthy, and dangerous habits. Leaders in the local church must take soul care seriously and intentionally as they begin spiritual disciplines personally. It is absolutely possible to refill the tank that was once depleted. As readers will see in the subsequent chapters, healing and recovery are possible.

After experiencing a burn-out of his own, Cordeiro had someone tell him to take two months to do as many of the things that fill his tank as he could in order to

³⁷ DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, 30.

³⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), xi.

recharge.³⁹ One of my personal mentors, Rick Warren, is a man who has led well and continues to lead well with the highest of integrity for over forty years. He once encouraged me during an incredibly busy season with this: “If you work with your mind, you should rest with your hands. If you work with your hands, you should rest with your mind.” His recommendation is a gift for leaders in the local church. Often times, leaders in the local church work a lot with their minds as they study, write, counsel, shepherd, and preach. Work for many leaders in the local church is done with the mind. One of the ways to rest is by not doing something that requires the mind to be active and firing. Warren and I both rest well with LEGO. Every Easter, after lots of services, thousands of people, and working with my mind, I rest and refuel by building a Lego set. For me, it is restful, relaxing, and refuels me to re-enter the local church world happily and well rested. Start with LEGO and continue building as you develop a framework of soul care and the disciplines of spiritual formation. The outcome, as Mathis suggests, “when all is said and done, our hope is not to be a skilled Bible reader, practiced pray-er, and faithful churchman,”⁴⁰ but rather to be the one whom the prophet Jeremiah said “understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth” (Jer 9:23-24). Yes, caring for the soul and practicing spiritual discipline for the purpose of Godliness will take immense discipline and work, but the disciplines bring the abundance of God⁴¹ into the life of everyone who practices them.

Coaches, Counselors, and Spiritual Leaders

The majority of the spiritual disciplines are done individually and personally for the benefit of the individual. But for leaders to survive, they must commit to not

³⁹ Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty*, 88.

⁴⁰ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 30.

⁴¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 1.

leading alone. American culture has written a narrative throughout the past decades and centuries glamorizing the self-made man. Hollywood celebrates the zero to hero story while social media fuels the viral sensation of a story involving someone coming from absolutely nothing to phenom status. However, this ideology of a self-made narrative captures something of a faux reality. The reality is that there is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. No mere mortal has self-sufficiently created himself out of nothing to then develop himself into the something of status. The very nature of human existence biologically and physiologically necessitates other people to grow. Newborn babies do not exist without two coming together. Elementary students do not learn to read by the osmotic laying on of hands to Doctor Seuss books. Even PGA golfers do not learn to play the game of golf at the absolute highest level without swing coaches. Why would leaders think that they are exempt from this natural cosmic reality? The weight of leadership is a heavy burden to bear, but God never designed it to be carried alone. Recent Barna research reveals that “pastors are more likely than the general population to feel lonely and isolated from others.”⁴² When it comes to surviving leadership, the chances of making it out alive are drastically reduced when leaders attempt a solo act. When working on building a greater self-awareness and a healthier emotional intelligence, there is a chance that the leader will be faced with some difficult realities. When spending time in self-reflection and through times of silence and solitude, there may be times where the person will begin to notice what Sauls refers to as “ugly things happening in us and the ugliness disturbs us, it’s usually a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work.”⁴³ The good news is that as leaders begin to sink into personal spiritual disciplines, soul care, and self-work, the Spirit begins the work of revealing what is missing, what is wrong, or what is unhealthy.

⁴² The Barna Group, *State of Pastors*, 38.

⁴³ Sauls, *From Weakness to Strength*, 91.

My friend, Matt, went in for a routine physical as a healthy and happy brand-new father. He wanted to be the best dad possible and keep a regular check on his physical well-being. As a successful leader in the tech industry, he had done well for his family through his many professional accomplishments. While everything felt and appeared normal, when the doctor returned the results of the standard blood work, Matt learned that he had an aggressive form of cancer that had riddled his body. While he was just doing regular maintenance, the slight amount of digging revealed issues that he would not have seen himself with a look in the mirror. Likewise, leadership may come natural to some, and self-awareness may be easier done for others, but the reality is that when a leader begins a life of introspection, there comes a time where he or she needs others to join them on their journey of emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness. Combining psychology with spiritual formation, Therapists Alison Cook and Kimberly Miller say, “Whether you feel as if you’re shining like a stained-glass window or broken like shards of glass, beautiful things happen when you invite Jesus to be near parts of your soul in need.”⁴⁴ As Jesus begins this work in a life personally, leaders who survive readily and willingly illicit the support and help of others.

For me, that support comes in the form of my wife, Kara; my biblical counselor, Larry; and my soul care coach, Ken. Among other voices in my life, such as family and close friends, these three have been personally invited by me to reveal blind spots, share personal perception of who I am and how I come across, and reach deep within my heart and soul to help serve me in my journey toward emotional, spiritual, and mental health. For many years I viewed counseling and therapy as the white elephant in a room of faithful and godly men. I saw those who went to see a counselor or therapist as not fully believing and living the life in which Jesus invites his children. My perception of counseling changed when I met my wife, Kara. She patiently, thoroughly, and persuasively led me to realize

⁴⁴ Alison Cook and Kimberly Miller, *Boundaries for Your Soul: How to Turn Your Overwhelming Thoughts and Feelings into Your Greatest Allies* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2018), 48.

that everyone needs a therapist, even those who are completely happy and healthy. Kara walked me through the process of normalizing biblical counseling for the purpose of having another fellow Christian walking with me on my pilgrimage of life. My gratitude for this new perception and philosophy changed my life. While this was a necessary step in my own personal growth, my transition to Saddleback Church was the next step.

My pastor, Rick Warren, lost his son to suicide after a lifelong battle with mental illness. Rick said that Matthew “‘struggled from birth with mental illness, dark holes of depression, and even suicidal thoughts.’ After a happy evening with his parents, the e-mail said, ‘in a momentary wave of despair at his home, he took his life.’”⁴⁵ Through this deep pain and loss, Warren and his wife have travelled the world sharing the hope that God never wastes a hurt as they stand with people who hurt. They launched a ministry, Hope 4 Mental Health, which serves on the premise that when people are hurting, the first place they call is the local church.⁴⁶ Warren regularly in his sermons, on his daily radio show, and throughout social media reminds the world that it is not a sin to be sick, someone’s illness is not their identity, and their chemistry is not their character. These words serve as hope for those struggling with a hurt, a habit, or a hang-up. And leaders in the local church can likely, if not certainly, relate to one of those. There may be unresolved problems in an individual’s childhood that can easily become like unresolved debts that they know are present but just do not want to face or deal with. Carey Nieuwhof, pastor of Connexus Church in Canada, says that “your unresolved past will sink your future unless you deal with it.”⁴⁷ There may be hidden vulnerabilities, areas of weakness, seasons of struggle with hurt or with sin that need to be dealt with before it sinks our

⁴⁵ Ravi Somaiya, “Matthew Warren, Son of Influential Minister, Dies at 27,” *The New York Times*, April 6, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/us/rev-rick-warrens-son-matthew-commits-suicide.html>.

⁴⁶ Hope for Mental Health, accessed January 2, 2020, <http://hope4mentalhealth.com/>.

⁴⁷ Nieuwhof, *Didn’t See It Coming*, 155.

leaderSHIP. Andy Crouch reveals, “No one can turn hidden vulnerability into flourishing without friends. We will never be able to fully reveal our vulnerability to the wide world—but we will never survive it without companions willing to bear it with us.”⁴⁸

For me, the journey of emotional health has come through a long and difficult road of becoming more self-aware through building my emotional intelligence, and I have done this through my soul-searching work with my wife, my therapist, and my soul care coach. I also have friends to whom I can call at any time of the day to process anything on my mind and heart.

My family had been saving up for a puppy for years, almost five to be exact. When we followed God’s call to Southern California and Saddleback Church, we not only left behind our family and friends in Tennessee, but we also had to leave behind our dog, Libby. Libby was beloved by everyone who met her. At just over four pounds soaking wet, Libby was a miniature Yorkshire Terrier that we bought in a shady deal in a K-Mart parking lot. Although her first few weeks of life were likely crazy, our family brought the certainty of love, companionship, and one too many treats. Saying goodbye to Libby was one of our more difficult moments in transitioning to my current role as Lead Pastor at Saddleback Church Rancho Capistrano. After saving our money for years, Kara and I decided to surprise our kids with a brand-new puppy after almost five years of not having an animal in our home. We were thoroughly excited to bring Cali home with us at her disclosed age of ten weeks. The joy on Addy and Bauer’s faces erased the years without a dog instantaneously. Much to my chagrin, Cali snuggled with us in bed starting on her first night home. She was everything we wanted as a miniature golden doodle. Within twenty-four hours, this fairytale story became a living nightmare as Cali had a seizure in our kitchen floor, and after three days in a Veterinarian Emergency Room, we said goodbye to our puppy after only six days with her. I got in the car to go sign the final

⁴⁸ Andy Crouch, *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk, and True Flourishing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 4.

paperwork for her inevitable euthanasia and was very emotional and sad with the soon to be loss of our dog. I was not sure I could walk into the veterinarian's office to take care of this on my own. I called my dear friend and ministry partner, Stephen, who answered his phone like he does anytime I call at any time of the day. Stephen met me at the animal hospital, listened as I shared our whole family's deep and genuine pain surrounding the loss of our new puppy, and graciously took Cali after I said my goodbyes on behalf of our entire family. We live 2,500 miles away from our family, but in that moment, Stephen was God's grace through friendship. Stephen showed up in a moment of deep pain, witnessed my raw emotion, loved me through grief and loss, and was the love of Jesus in the form of a friend. What is worth noting is, he does not like dogs. Stephen leads a highly successful international company that has many demands on his time and input. He has a beautiful family who is blessed with his influence and God given wisdom. That day, he likely had dozens if not hundreds of items on his agenda,⁴⁹ but the interruption I provided was a moment for him to display the life to which Jesus calls his followers. This interruption became a moment of much needed love, support, and grace.

Leader, there will be times in your life when you feel desperate, alone, and afraid. You are not. Regardless of where the leader is, God has put people in your life that you need, and just because you are a leader does not mean you cannot have safe people to expose your hurts to. Do not go through life alone. I beg you, do not lead alone. And do not journey into the depths of your heart and soul alone. Find someone to journey with you. Find several people who will walk alongside you to encourage and challenge you. As a leader in the local church, who himself walked through burnout and difficulty, Cordeiro writes, "The very nature of the healing process will require that you disclose your feelings and inward pain. Bruised emotions and depressions can yearn for safe

⁴⁹ My friend Stephen is Scottish, so he would call it his diary. Anytime I hear the uniquely English words, I store them away to be pulled back out when I am watching episodes of *The Crown* on Netflix, or for fun conversations about culture in the UK.

harbors and hiding places.”⁵⁰ Leaders cannot survive if those hurts, habits, and hang-ups find safe harbor and their hiding place in secret. The good news of the gospel is that while Jesus’ voice comes with authority, it never arrives bringing shame. Paul captures the safety of the gospel for the hurting when he wrote in Colossians 2:14-15,

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

Christian leaders can confidently take their debt to Jesus and share their burden with someone. I have seven someone’s in my life, that I internally refer to as “my seven.” My seven consists of my wife Kara; my dad; my therapist; my soul care coach; my friend, Stephen; and another two friends. How about you? Who is speaking into your life, helping you identify blind spots, and challenging you to continue to grow?

What leaders will find is that God never wastes a hurt. Scazzero, who knows this deeply and personally, suggests that the more someone can “recognize and engage your own shadow is the degree to which you can free others to face theirs.”⁵¹ As my pastor and my friend, Rick Warren, always says, “Other people are going to find healing in your wounds. Your greatest life messages and your most effective ministry will come out of your deepest hurts. The things you’re most embarrassed about, most ashamed of, and most reluctant to share are the very tools God can use most powerfully to heal others.”⁵² As leaders begin the journey, they will find that while Jesus does not promise to take all problems away, he does want his children to bring worries, hurts, frustrations, and confusions to him. When this is done, he promises to give rest for the soul.

⁵⁰ Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty*, 156.

⁵¹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 63.

⁵² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 271.

Boundaries in Calling and Character

At the young and ripe age of twenty-four, I had my first old man moment of yelling “get off of my lawn” while standing in workout clothes on my front porch. We had just bought our very first house and we were so proud of it. We had saved up enough money to put a down payment on the house that we helped build, and in an effort to save some money, I decided to forego the \$7,500 sod installation and instead put in my own lawn. While this could be seen as young and reckless, the entrepreneur in me started my very own lawn care and landscaping business at the age of twelve. I worked countless hours in the humid heat of the summer to save up money for my first car, a 1992 Toyota pickup truck, extended cab. Working these countless hours in landscaping taught me what was needed to grow and sustain a beautiful lawn for my customers. It also led me to have confidence in myself and save lots of money in my first house. My Papa and my Dad helped me spread two truckloads of fresh topsoil in my front and side yard, so that the foundation of my lawn was not clay and rock. Jesus gave the first instruction recorded in the Parable of the Sower when he talked about what soil was best set up for success in growing the seeds that were sown (Matt 13:1-9). After the fresh soil was smoothed out, we spread a fescue mix, and started watering. In less than a week, the grass was sprouting, and after a few weeks, I mowed my lawn for the first time and celebrated by taking off my shoes and socks and taking a walk along the carpeted feel of the grass. Even the greens keeper at Augusta National Golf Course, home of The Masters Golf Tournament, would have been impressed with how immaculate the lawn we labored over had turned out. I remember the pure joy I experienced when I mowed a checkerboard pattern into my perfect lawn. I was enjoying breakfast while looking out of our front window when I noticed a contractor covered in clay, rock, cement, and other hazardous materials sure to endanger the perfectly groomed fescue. He started walking out of the twelve-inch-deep mud toward my lawn as I began to think to myself, “he couldn’t possibly be considering wiping off his boots in my yard.” When, what to my wondering eyes did appear, but a contractor, wiping off his disgusting boots in my lawn did appear. I watched, much like

Clark Griswold seeing his cousin Eddie emptying the waste from his RV, as the contractor defaced my checkerboard striped lawn by replacing it with concrete, clay mud, and more. I left my half-eaten bacon to scold this man, not for his mullet, but for destroying my lawn. It was in my utter disbelief that I decided it was time for a fence. Fences keep certain people out who might otherwise want to wipe off the debris from their shoes into a lawn, but fences also serve to keep other things in.

When it comes to surviving leadership, fences must be built around the leader and by the leader so that unwelcomed visitors do not rain on their parade, but also so that their personal and specific calling and character do not leave the yard to pursue other opportunities that are outside the lines of their leadership and life. Barton suggests, “Our unwillingness to live within limits—both personally and in our community is one of the deepest sources of depletion and eventual burnout.”⁵³ Those leaders without boundaries are emotionally unhealthy leaders who are chronically overextended and have no clear boundaries either personally or professionally. David Brooks, editor at the *New York Times*, once interviewed Sandra Bullock after winning an Oscar award. At the time of her award, she was recently divorced and estranged from her husband, and he wrote after interviewing her following her triumphant win, asking, “Would you exchange a tremendous professional triumph for a severe personal blow?”⁵⁴ Jesus asked this question in a different way that is found in Mark 8:36: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his own soul?” Without boundaries, this question will become a reality in the life of a leader who gives his all to watering another man’s lawn and neglecting his own. This is the reality of the leader who does not establish boundaries for the sake of their family, the sake of their personal integrity, and the sake of God’s calling on their life and ministry.

⁵³ Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 111.

⁵⁴ David Brooks, “The Sandra Bullock Trade,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/30/opinion/30brooks.html>.

Boundaries for the Leader's Family

It may be easier to feel like leaders are successful, respected, and thriving when they are at work. But just because ministry comes more naturally does not mean it is more important than family. Research has shown that pastors voluntarily admit that they feel like ministry is an outright hazard to their family.⁵⁵ While making this sobering admission, they also willingly say that family is near the bottom of their priorities.⁵⁶ The very nature of local church ministry brings the never-ending demand of need, and ministry needs do not stop just because the leader clocks out of the office. Ministry needs never stop pouring in and will not stop growing larger and longer the more a leader takes on. Understandably so, those in the middle of a crisis rarely consider the prior engagements or family commitments that a leader has. If the local church leader is not the senior most leader in the organization, then it is likely that more and more responsibilities and tasks will continue to fall into the leader's to do list if that leader does not establish boundaries in their own schedule and protections around their family time. Add to this the fact that technology has completely blurred the boundary lines between work and family. There seem to be no boundaries regarding when people expect leaders in the local church to be available to work.⁵⁷ However, Greg McKeown suggests, "The problem is not that the boundaries have been blurred; it's that the boundary of work has edged insidiously into family territory."⁵⁸ McKeown goes on to suggest that unless leaders establish boundaries and priorities on their own, someone will establish them for them.⁵⁹ Leaders who survive are biblically informed on the priority of their first ministry being their own family, and

⁵⁵ H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who've Been There*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 20.

⁵⁶ London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 216.

⁵⁷ Greg McKeown, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* (New York: Crown Business, 2014), 164.

⁵⁸ McKeown, *Essentialism*, 165.

⁵⁹ McKeown, *Essentialism*, 10.

laser focused on intentionally creating the boundaries to protect their family from the shrapnel of ministry wounding them in the short and long term.

I learned this lesson personally, and I learned it the hard way as I was leading a rapidly growing and fiercely effective ministry in a local church plant in my hometown. Conference organizers were reaching out to invite me to speak to leaders around the world, my blog posts were being shared and distributed daily. A popular evangelical monthly magazine contracted me and eventually published my work on the Gospel of John. By all accounts, things were going exceedingly well. Not only was I leading a thriving gospel ministry, but I still made time for interpersonal and pastoral interaction with anyone who requested it. I took 95 percent of the meetings that were requested of me regardless of the time of day. While my mentor was encouraging on the ministry leadership front, he challenged me on my time with family with five simple yet profound words: “You are not that important.” Certainly, he was not trying to discourage me or rain on the parade I was in. He was, however, speaking truth that I needed to hear. I was prioritizing my productivity and success in ministry over my own family. It was not egregious in sin or blatant apostasy. Pride displayed itself in replying within 60 minutes to emails that came all hours of the day. It showed up in the simplicity of turning all notifications possible on my smart phone. It displayed itself in saying yes to leading well in ministry, which meant saying no to leading well within the four walls of my own home. Ministry in the local church is not as important as ministry in the leader’s own home. Leaders may need to hear this today like I needed to over a decade ago. Truth be told, leaders are individually unique, leaders are important, and people truly care about them. But leaders are replaceable in local church ministry. The church they lead in and the ministry that they have worked for can replace them. However, the leader’s family cannot replace them.

Boundaries for the Leader’s Own Life

Personal boundaries are the personal protection that will prevent sin from making a leader stupid. Billy Graham famously crafted a strategy in which he defined the

boundaries around his life to cultivate integrity in everything he did. Known as the “Modesto Manifesto,” Graham, along with ministry partners, resolved to live a life upholding the highest standard of biblical morality and integrity.⁶⁰ In recent years, the Vice President of the United States, Mike Pence, has come under intense scrutiny for being a gender discriminator and sexist because he upholds this same rule of life as a boundary.⁶¹ Personal boundaries protect those things that leaders personally value most. There are many times when people may not understand or agree with these boundaries, but leaders define the reality of their life through the lens and truth of Scripture. McKeown warns leaders: “When people make their problem our problem, we aren’t helping them; we’re enabling them.”⁶² When boundaries are absent from the leader’s personal life, much like the water leak in our home, the slow drip becomes a streaming river. Without boundaries, small and respectable sins lead to scandalous and public humiliation. Leaders in the local church come with no exemptions to the grip of sin in the life of a human on this side of eternity. Leaders writing down those boundaries will protect their life and ministry from the failure that would otherwise willingly cripple a ministry. All it takes is one time to disqualify a leader from ministry, and the ripple effect of this extends to the church, the community, and home to the family.

Boundaries for the Leader’s Calling

Discovering, defining, and defending a leader’s “yes”⁶³ is the simplest and

⁶⁰ Billy Graham, “What’s ‘the Billy Graham Rule?’” July 23, 2019, <https://billygraham.org/story/the-modesto-manifesto-a-declaration-of-biblical-integrity/>.

⁶¹ The Times Editorial Board, “Following the Billy Graham Rule Doesn’t Make You Noble. It Makes You a Sexist Dinosaur,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-billy-graham-rule-sexist-20190716-story.html>.

⁶² McKeown, *Essentialism*, 168.

⁶³ For the context of this project, I define a leader’s “yes” as those roles, responsibilities, tasks, and other items that a leader commits to do, perform, accept responsibility for, or take on under the scope of their leadership.

most effective way to build a boundary around his or her calling. God has shaped and created each and every leader with a purpose to fulfill for His kingdom. He or she has been uniquely wired and gifted by the Sovereign Creator of the universe with abilities and passions that others do not have. Within the local church context, there are certain things only one particular leader can do. There are other things that leaders do that any one of the staff or volunteers on the team can handle, which could also help others discover their own calling in ministry if the leader let it go and delegated responsibilities or tasks. Defining and defending what the leader's yes is begins the process of creating boundaries around their calling. The leader's yes is that unique calling and design God has given him or her. Their yes drives their leadership, life, and ministry. Their yes keeps them up at night and wakes them up to passionately start the day. Finding their yes gains them a high-level clarity around their purpose. Discovering and defining their yes gives leaders the freedom to say no to the things that are not part of their calling and purpose. As Anne Lamotte says, "No is a complete sentence."⁶⁴

Now, before leaders begin to uncap their Sharpie and strike through all of the parts of their job that they do not enjoy doing, hear this: Leaders do hard things. There are times that leaders do the things that they have to in order to get to do the things that they want to. DeYoung shares his own personal experience when he writes, "Stewarding my time is not about selfishly pursuing only the things I like to do. It's about effectively serving others in the ways I'm best able to serve and in the ways I am most uniquely called to serve."⁶⁵ In meeting with many young leaders, ten out of ten initially want to get into ministry for all of the glamorous parts of ministry. They want to preach, they want to spend their week digging into the text of Scripture, unpacking the context, and deliver a life changing message of God's unchanging gospel as revealed in Scripture. They want to

⁶⁴ Many authors and speakers have been attributed as saying this phrase, or something similar. Some attribute it to Oprah, Lisa Swan, Tam Hodge, Anne Lamotte, or others.

⁶⁵ DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, 61.

stand on the stage, under the lights, and then have their sticky statement go viral through social media which would eventually lead to speaking in front of thousands around the world at leadership conferences. The problem is, the chances of something like this are humbling when they reveal the rarity of this opportunity in ministry. The majority of pastors who are faithful and excellent expositors of the Word preach regularly to smaller crowds, which is just as amazing and just as life changing as the coveted conference circuit communicator because it is their calling. If leaders enter the ministry in hopes of fame, followers, and fortune, they will be quickly disappointed to find none of the above. There are times when leaders do the hard thing because leaders do hard things.

I have also met with many young leaders who, in an attempt to discern their own personal call to ministry, consider going into vocational local church ministry because they do not know what else they would do. They went into college with plans to become a financial planner, but soon realized that they do not really enjoy accounting and finance. Others are granted admissions into another field of study to find out that they cannot quite handle the classes in that area. While each call to ministry is different, no call to ministry should be a fall back plan. Many of the leaders I have spoken to and met with who left ministry after a short time of five years or less have said they came to the middle of their college career unsure of what career they would go toward after graduation, and they enjoyed volunteering in the church and the idea of becoming a pastor more than the idea of becoming a doctor, so they thought they would give it a try. A call to ministry is rarely, if ever, the back-up or fall back plan if other plans do not work out. My own call to ministry is an example of this. Growing up, for as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a dentist. While other young boys in my kindergarten were talking about becoming police officers, firefighters, or garbage truck drivers, I always wanted to become a dentist. I worked throughout my school years with this end in mind and graduated high school toward the top of my class. Entering the University of Tennessee, I worked incredibly hard in my double major of Biology and Chemistry, positioned at the top of my class

with a 4.0 grade point average. Throughout my high school and college years, I was actively involved in my home church and the church I was a member of in Martin, Tennessee, while away for college. I volunteered in ministry, served on foreign and domestic mission trips, and even filled in preaching at times. I grew to love serving in ministry and began to wrestle with God's call on my life to vocational ministry.

Throughout my college years I questioned what God wanted me to do with my life. Many times, I wrote off the idea of going into ministry by using the excuse of a dentist's income and the blessing that would be to churches, pastors, and missions. I felt like becoming a dentist would open the doors financially to be able to support those in ministry. These excuses continued until I finally surrendered to ministry my junior year of college. My pastor, Roger "Sing" Oldham, played an instrumental part in discerning my call. He graciously affirmed my gifts and talents in leadership and ministry, but what was more helpful was his caution in entering the ministry. He pointed me to Charles Haddon Spurgeon's wise advice to men considering their own call to ministry:

Do not enter the ministry *if you can help it*, was the deeply sage advice of a divine to one who sought his judgment. If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fulness, for a man so filled with God would utterly weary of any pursuit by that for which his inmost soul pants.⁶⁶

I knew with great confidence that nothing else I could do in life would satisfy me other than pastoring in a local church. If someone is considering ministry, I would charge that person to evaluate what their specific call is, confirming that going into ministry is not a plan if other plans fall through. A leader may very well be a fantastic volunteer leader, a gifted ministry leader, and possess a deeply pastoral heart and still not be called to ministry. Pastor Dayton Hartman offers a humbling commentary and warning when he writes, "We have far too many unqualified, untested men filling our pulpits and being

⁶⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (1875; repr., Philadelphia: Pantianos Classics, 2018), 26-27, emphasis added.

vested with pastoral authority because they are gifted and believe they have been called to the ministry. We don't need more men who are gifted; we need more men who are qualified."⁶⁷

When a leader knows their yes and is confident in their calling, then they are able to establish healthy boundaries to maximize effectiveness and minimize distraction. Humans tend to gravitate toward whatever is urgent. In their book on getting work done and accomplishing goals, Chris McChesney and Sean Covey suggest, "The real enemy of execution is your day job! We call it the *whirlwind*. It is the massive amount of energy that is necessary just to keep your operation going on a day-to-day basis; and, ironically, it's also the thing that makes it so hard to execute anything new. The whirlwind robs from you the focus required to move your team forward."⁶⁸ The daily grind of a leader includes not only leading the strategic and visionary side of the local church, but also managing the unexpected and interruption tasks that come up. The temptation that arises within the realm of leadership in a local church will be to make what is urgent become what is most important. And when there is a clash of urgent and important, urgency always wins.⁶⁹ If leaders ignore the urgent, it could kill the organization today, but if the important is ignored, it will kill the organization tomorrow.⁷⁰ Within an organization there will be people who do not have the understanding of the leader's specific calling or role, and in an attempt to get things done, will forward what is urgent to the leader's responsibility. However, leaders do not take one person's urgency and make it their emergency. Leaders must not assume responsibility for tasks that arise out of someone

⁶⁷ Dayton Hartman, *Lies Pastors Believe: 7 Ways to Elevate Yourself, Subvert the Gospel, and Undermine the Church* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 47.

⁶⁸ Chris McChesney and Sean Covey, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals* (New York: Free Press Publishing, 2016), 6.

⁶⁹ McChesney and Covey, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, 7.

⁷⁰ McChesney and Covey, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, 8.

else's lack of preparation. A lack of planning on their part does not constitute an emergency on another leader's part. Setting up healthy boundaries gives the leader the opportunity to build in parameters of when interruptions become the current priority. While there are times when interruptions become urgent, if a leader is not careful, the new normal will be taking care of whatever the next urgent task becomes. And when leaders only work on putting out fires, they cannot work on building systems and strategies toward health and growth. Seth Godin succinctly summarizes, "Saying yes to everything is a scary strategy. Because it is no strategy at all. It hands your future over to the inbox, randomizing your path and absolving you of possibility. Perhaps it would be more effective to say, 'work overtime to make sure that the things you are offered are the things you'd like to do.' Then say yes to them."⁷¹

Establishing boundaries in their life, for their family, and for their calling are not evidence that leaders are incapable of handling the job or that they are in any way weak. On the contrary, boundaries prevent leaders from being hijacked by unknowing people who are creeping into their lawn. Barton summarizes, "To live within our limits is to live humbly as the creature and not the Creator."⁷² There are things that leaders cannot do. There are time limits within the created order that prevent leaders from accomplishing everything that that leader or anyone else wants them to do. But leaders are finite and limited, and setting boundaries establishes that in their heart personally and on their platform publicly.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to serve as a primer for the pump of the leader's soul, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence. The hope throughout this chapter was to get

⁷¹ Seth Godin, "Say Yes to Everything," accessed March 12, 2020. <https://seths.blog/2020/03/say-yes-to-everything/>.

⁷² Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 183.

the waters of gospel relationships that are required for health and survival moving so that leaders can begin to establish boundaries in their life and leadership. When it comes to surviving leadership in the local church, emotional intelligence affords the leader the opportunity to know when burnout is near, to know when relational stress is caving in, and to build the boundaries needed to survive. If leaders find themselves currently facing a burnout, then they should not give up. They should open up to a friend or safe person and seek help, knowing that the friend may not be the person who is able to provide the help they need. As leaders cultivate a rigorous diet of personal spiritual disciplines, they should continue to be attentive in caring for their soul. Each leader should define what rest looks like for him or her and drive toward that destination, knowing that feeling fully rested will likely take time. Leaders need to begin to establish and build healthy boundaries that protect them from future failure or burnout by intentionally scheduling margin. And as Barton states, “Spiritual leadership emerges from our willingness to stay involved with our own soul—that place where God’s Spirit is at work stirring up our deepest questions and longings to draw us deeper into relationship with him.”⁷³ Proverbs 25:28 says, “Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit” (NASB).

When I was a child, growing up in Middle Tennessee meant spending summer nights sitting on the edge of the porch with a humongous hunk of watermelon. My generation grew up in the dark ages of watermelon consumption where we had to manually sift out the unsuspecting seeds as we enjoyed the refreshing crisp fruit of the melon. Unlike other parents, my parents would lovingly build resilience and patience in our character by letting us get the seeds out on our own accord. For a country boy in Tennessee who had a long and punishingly hot day playing home run derby in the front yard, or helping my parents with mowing the lawn, I could not wait to bite into the cool

⁷³ Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 25.

and juicy watermelon. That meant I had to eat, separate the seeds, and spit them out as I ate. One summer, my Papa's farm yielded watermelons by the dozen, and my brother and I along with our cousins were the human garbage disposals, eating them as fast as he could harvest them. As we sat with our feet dangling off of the porch, which I am certain would not meet safety codes and standards of our current day, we would competitively spit the seeds as far as we could. We also tormented June bugs and bumble bees by spitting watermelon seeds at them as if we were the pest control of the city. I will never forget the watermelon season of the next summer, as we watched our very own watermelon plant begin to sprout and produce our own delicious, seeded watermelon. I learned the farming and harvesting principle that you reap what you sow.

When it comes to the leader's personal life, the seeds he or she plants, whether on purpose or by accident, yield the fruit of what was planted. If leaders want to survive leadership, they must plant health, cultivate self-awareness, toil toward emotional awareness, and invite others into the fields with them as they establish healthy boundaries to ensure that their leadership does not just survive, but thrives for decades of faithful gospel ministry. It does not happen with Christian busyness, but with gospel faithfulness.

CHAPTER 4

FROM BURNOUT AND BROKENNESS TO THE BETTER WAY

The turn of the decade brought about a renewed sense of hope. Regardless of the date on the annual calendar, the new year springs forth new life, renewed purpose, and an opportunity to refresh what has grown stale or dormant in years past. Many see the new year as the right time to make the changes needed to ensure better health, more quality of life, or just a new start to leave behind old narratives. The year 2020 ushered in manifold and abundant measure of this New Year, “New Me” fever. Economic growth was extravagant compared to decades past. Election year in the United States promises a renewal of some semblance of government pressing the restart button. The year 2020 started with promise, hope, and joy, but lurking in the shadows of life in America was the invisible and fatal threat of Covid-19. At the writing of this project, as of July 2, the infection rate has climbed globally to 10,933,326, claiming the lives of 521,658 people.¹ From the official naming of the virus on February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control officially declared this virus outbreak to be a global pandemic in less than thirty days.² While some may suggest that this deadly virus was on American soil prior to the turn of the decade, the overwhelming majority, if not all Americans, had no clue that this crisis would arrive. NBA arenas were packed to the brim

¹ Worldometer, “Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic,” accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>. I accessed this site twice, first on March 30, 2020 when the statistics included an infection rate of 780,560 and a death rate of 37,552. The research with updated numbers from was accessed on this July 2, 2020.

² World Health Organization, “Rolling Updates on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19),” accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>.

while concerts were exploding with people. Handshakes, high-fives, and hugs continued to be completely normal while a virus lurked in the shadows, unknown to the masses.

Similar to how the Novel Coronavirus spreads unknowingly but with early signs, the heart and soul, along with the emotional and spiritual life of leaders, have early warning signs in their public and private lives. Of course, these inconsistencies in the lives of others are easy to see. Tim Irwin suggests, “Derailment occurs over time—it really happens before the crash.”³ Just like it is easy to notice the gross error of installing the toilet paper to roll out from the bottom, as opposed from the top of the roll down, or identifying the massive flaw of eating a Kit-Kat by biting directly into the four bars after unwrapping, diagnosing the gaps and inconsistencies in the lives of others is a generally easy task. The gaps in our own lives seemingly sneak up on us. Pastor and author Jon Tyson says it this way about the blindness of the individual in compromise: “The things that derail us seem to come out of nowhere, or they come with such subtle deceptiveness that we don’t think they will shape us in the long run.”⁴ The habits, secrets, and inconsistencies in life that derail are not typically a sudden onset issue, but rather an invisible-to-the-individual heart issue that lurks beneath the surface of a leader, much like Covid-19. Op-ed columnist and Yale Professor David Brooks follows the trail of where this leads in the personal life of an individual:

You follow your desires wherever they take you, and you approve of yourself so long as you are not obviously hurting anyone else. You figure that if the people around you seem to like you, you must be good enough. In the process you end up slowly turning yourself into something a little less impressive than you had originally hoped. A humiliating gap opens up between your actual self and your desired self.⁵

³ Tim Irwin, *Derailed: Five Lessons Learned from Catastrophic Failures of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 88.

⁴ Jon Tyson, *The Burden Is Light: Liberating Your Life from the Tyranny of Performance and Success* (New York: Multnomah, 2018), 10.

⁵ David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (New York: Random House, 2015), xiv.

Moral failures and burnout can be traced back to both internal and external conditions that are identifiable and recognizable: external forces within the context of a broken culture, the grueling pace of life, the relentless grind of ministry, and the tantalizing and glamorous nature of leadership, and internal forces such as personal and incapacitating insecurities that delve into the debilitating chase of comparison. Alternative components such as pride creep into the mind and heart of leaders, which eviscerate the ability to thrive in the local church. Internal factors of brokenness, pain, and trauma if unaddressed, lead to dysfunctional patterns. And of course, secret sin drives toward isolation. Because of his experience in ministry for an extensive career, leading at the highest of levels and understanding these internal and external factors, Lance Witt mindfully writes, “I understand why leaders walk away. I understand why they can be disillusioned and cynical. I understand why those who used to be filled with vision and passion are empty and filled with resentment and regret.”⁶ From extensive experience in ministry and exposure to leaders from around the world, he assembles the following troubling statistics:

1,500 pastors leave the ministry permanently each month in America.

80% of pastors and 85% of their spouses feel discouraged in their roles. Over 50% of pastors are so discouraged they would leave ministry if they could but have no other way of making a living.

70% of pastors do not have a close friend, confidant, or mentor.

30% of pastors said they had either been in an ongoing affair or had a one-time sexual encounter with a parishioner.

71% of pastors stated they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly and even a daily basis.

One out of every ten ministers will actually retire as a minister.⁷

⁶ Lance Witt, *Replenish: Leading from a Healthy Soul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 11.

⁷ Witt, *Replenish*, 18-19, citing research compiled from The Barna Group, Focus on the Family, Fuller Seminary, and the Institute of Church Leadership Development.

Thanks to the multitudinous research compiled by The Barna Group, Focus on the Family, Fuller Seminary,⁸ and others, the execution of research for this project focused on personal interviews of anonymous leaders from around the United States of America. For this project, eleven leaders were interviewed who experienced an early exit from leadership. By way of contrast, lifelong leaders who have led for twenty-five or more years were interviewed to explore the warning signs and safety barricades existent in leadership. The resulting consolidation analyzes the external and internal forces at work in the life of a leader that result in surviving leadership long-term or become a mortal effect in the leader's career and ministry. These are often unseen by the leader who does not survive but seen plainly by those around them. While this list is not exhaustive, nor does it provide a twenty-first century list of the updated deadly sins, it does capture a progression of a fall from grace or burnout from ministry.

Leadership Burnout

Our seven-year-old son, Bauer, is enamored with speed. Last fall we attended the Los Angeles Car Show together and got to see some of the newest and fastest cars on the planet. Bauer even got behind the wheel of the eight-hundred horse-power Dodge Challenger Hellcat. Ask Bauer the top speed of any land, water, or air creature and he can give you their top speed. My wife and I could not contain our laughter one time in a toy shop, before Bauer could read, when he picked up a stuffed animal bird, and confidently rattled off that this was indeed a peregrine falcon, and that they could reach a speed of 241.7 miles per hour.⁹ Bauer is addicted to speed and loves living life in the fast lane.

⁸ This project was built on the research from other organizations have done in previous studies, including, but not limited to, Fuller Institute of Church Growth, "1991 Survey of Pastors," Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1991. Injoy Ministries, "The State of the Pastor," 2002. The Barna Group, "The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity" 2017.

⁹ Neel V. Patel, "Research Reveals Exactly Why Peregrine Falcons Are so Deadly," Audubon April 13, 2018, <https://www.audubon.org/news/research-reveals-exactly-why-peregrine-falcons-are-so-deadly>.

Truth be told, he gets it both from me and from American culture. Yet one of the most dangerous aspects of leading in the local church, based on the interviews conducted, articles researched, and research executed, is the fast-pace of life and ministry. Brady Boyd warned in his book *Addicted to Busy*, “Ultimately, every problem I see in every person I know is a problem of moving too fast for too long in too many aspects of life.”¹⁰ Pointing to the fact that the fast paced life in the local church of leadership, David Murray writes, “The data on pastors is especially worrying, with high levels of stress, depression, and burnout leading to broken bodies, broken minds, broken hearts, broken marriages, and broken churches.”¹¹ *Christianity Today* cites research that suggests that 20 percent of all pastoral resignations are due to burnout.¹² *Psychology Today* joins with the World Health Organization in providing a definition to the term *burnout*, which they characterize as “a state of emotional, mental, and often physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress. Though it’s most often caused by problems at work, it can also appear in other areas of life, such as parenting, caretaking, or romantic relationships.”¹³ Of the pastors that were interviewed, 8 out of the 11 who did not make it across the finish line admitted that they were too busy, albeit busy doing good things like preaching and teaching, meeting with and counseling church members, speaking at conferences and retreats, writing books, raising their children, attending meetings, and serving in their community.

¹⁰ Brady Boyd, *Addicted to Busy: Recovery for the Rushed Soul* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2014), 44.

¹¹ David Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 11.

¹² Lisa Cannon-Green, “Why 734 Pastors Quit (and How Their Churches Could Have Kept Them),” *Christianity Today*, January 12, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/January/why-734-pastors-quit-how-churches-could-have-kept-them.html>.

¹³ “Burnout,” *Psychology Today*, accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/burnout>.

Living a life that is constant with incessant writing, working, and moving arose as an indicator of an inevitable crash. This busy pace is not just a trait and characteristic of church life. Derek Thompson points out, “Americans work longer hours, have shorter vacations, get less in unemployment, disability, and retirement benefits, and retire later, than people in comparably rich societies.”¹⁴ It is no wonder the culture has been labeled with a burnout syndrome¹⁵ and that the Millennial generation has been branded as the Burnout Generation.¹⁶ With the need and urgent desire for speed so that achievements and accomplishments can be met, burnout becomes unavoidable in the life of leaders who never slow down. Never asking the question of what this pace of life does to their own soul, leaders who lead from the fast lane are in a constant state of hurry, from one flight to the next, from writing one sermon to writing the next best seller. The byproduct of a life of hurry is a life of death. John Mark Comer writes, “Hurry kills all that we hold dear: spirituality, health, marriage, family, thoughtful work, creativity, generosity . . . name your value. Hurry is a sociopathic predator loose in our society.”¹⁷ Hurry and its conjoined twin of busyness showed up regularly in the leaders interviewed for this project and its ultimate outcome was always burnout. Anne Helen Petersen comments, “Burnout isn’t a place to visit and come back from; it’s our permanent residence. What used to be the isolated experience of a New York day trader or emergency room physician is now the reality for *most* people. We are beginning to understand what ails us, and it’s not

¹⁴ Derek Thompson, “Workism Is Making Americans Miserable,” *Atlantic*, February 24, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/>.

¹⁵ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁶ Anne Helen Petersen, “How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation,” *BuzzFeed*, January 5, 2019, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/annehelenpetersen/millennials-burnout-generation-debt-work>.

¹⁷ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2019), 53.

something an oxygen facial or a treadmill desk can fix.”¹⁸ Burnout, busy, and hurry only lead to dysfunction and unhealth. Comer observes, “When you get over busy, the things that are truly life giving for your soul are the first to go rather than your first go to—such as quiet time in the morning, Scripture, prayer, Sabbath, worship on Sunday, a meal with your community and so on.”¹⁹ None of the leaders interviewed who eventually left their ministry position were busy doing bad, sinful, or even wrong things. They were just busy and hurried like the rest of American culture. However, the busyness ultimately became blinding to the underlying negative effects in the life of a leader. As Tim Krieder notes in *The New York Times* article “The Busy Trap,” “Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day.”²⁰ The idea that doing something or lots of things suggests that you are doing the right thing is simply a misguided but often adopted mindset. Though, the results of this arduous pace are noble from the public’s perspective.

Those interviewed for this project received accolades like *The New York Times* Bestseller and highest attended conference sessions. They were praised for the rapid and sustained growth of the local church, and often celebrated for the number of lives changed by Christ. But this life of hurry and busy just frankly is not survivable. Witt admits, “Ministry drains us, sucks the life out of us, and the result is we are running on empty.”²¹

¹⁸ Petersen, “How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation.”

¹⁹ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 50.

²⁰ Tim Krieder, “The ‘Busy’ Trap,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2012, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/30/the-busy-trap/>.

²¹ Witt, *Replenish*, 24.

The Antidote to Burnout

There must be a better way. There is a better way. This way is evidenced in the life of Jesus, invited by the apostle Paul as a way to be imitated and emulated in leaders who thrived for the long term in ministry. John Eldridge invites the Christian into this way when he writes, “We who live in a far more insane hour and who want to find a better life in God ought to be the first to adopt a few practices that get us out of the madness and into a more settled way of living.”²² It starts with reframing the pace of life through the lens of the gospel. Leaders can rest because Jesus worked, and he accomplished everything humanity needs through his finished work on the cross. When the discussion of what needs to be done on a daily basis is brought up, it must be made clear what Jesus has already done. Mankind’s ability to rest is a direct result of Jesus’ completed work. The only reason leaders can lay down the burdensome busyness of life is because Jesus laid down his life. With his once and final work on the cross, leaders can embrace and experience the freedom to live a life with margin, trusting that God is able to do more in the resting periods of their day, week, and month than they would be able to accomplish if they kept going at an unsustainable pace.

Just this week, my schedule looked much like every other week. Meetings with the church staff, board meetings with the executive leadership team, and time with families and individuals from the church family and community filled my calendar. Today, I left one appointment and made my way to my dentist appointment that I booked six months in advance so that I would not have to rearrange other typical appointments during a workday. I gave myself plenty of time for the commute, which Google Maps indicated with a helpful notification that it would take nine minutes to get to the dentist’s office. I left ten minutes before, giving myself a whopping one minute of breathing room while hoping that traffic would not slow me down in the backroad route I planned to take. As I

²² John Eldridge, *Get Your Life Back: Everyday Practices for a World Gone Mad* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 7.

pulled out of the parking lot, my Mini Cooper signaled a driving hazard under the hood with my engine overheating with every inch forward. It incessantly warned me with beeping, buzzing, lights, and messages on the dashboard panel that stopping all movement in my vehicle was necessary before complete disaster ensued. After I safely pulled over, called the local mechanic, received dire warnings of permanent engine damage with repeated use, I finally called AAA to tow my car to the shop. This unwelcome appointment was not on my calendar for today. And because I had no margin in my schedule, I was late, stressed, and in trouble.

Margin is absolutely necessary for surviving leadership in the local church. While leaders are busy checking boxes off the task list for the day and accomplishing ministry related responsibilities, margin becomes an afterthought of a life defined by overload. Friday nights are booked solid for months with activities and kids sports leagues. The grocery store refrigerator section provides consumers with four dozen different white milks to choose from, not to mention the alternative dairy products like almond milk, soy milk, and coconut milk to name a few. Personal and professional finances are maxed out and on overload with crippling debt. Homes are overloaded with media from smart devices to televisions and beyond. Noise and sound overload even the smallest of towns with the gentle hums of electricity in use. Storage units house the junk that would not fit in homes so that the possession overload does not overrun domestic comfort. This is not to mention the excess in workload both in careers and schools across the country. This unprecedented overload society that many have accepted and adapted to is not the way God designed his creation to live. A. J. Swoboda says, “We have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history.”²³ Unfortunately, leaders categorically fit in each of these overload syndromes.

²³ A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018), 5.

Leaders in the local church are just as busy and just as overloaded as other leaders. Eight out of the 11 leaders interviewed for this project admitted that they were too busy. Yet, when one sees the ministry, work, and life of Jesus, one sees him consistently pressing pause, pushing back, and removing himself from the hustle and bustle. As Jesus launches his ministry in a messianic identifying moment of healing that signaled to the masses that he is in fact the Messiah, he packs up, leaves the crowds, and goes to an empty and desolate place (Luke 4:42). The launch of a new business, a new venture, or a new church plant is a critical time to be out in the community with the people. Yet Jesus does what he came to Capernaum to do, and then left to be alone. In the very next chapter of Luke, just as he is building his leadership team and the momentum of a massive movement, Luke writes that as “great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities . . . he would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Luke 5:15-16). No doubt the people gathering in the masses needed to hear his teaching and their life would have been forever changed by it. The physical ailments in need of the healing that only Jesus could perform were likely desperate. However, Jesus built into his life and his ministry the principle of margin, which is shown again when Luke captures that “in these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). Lest the readers of the Gospels begin to imagine that Luke had a bias toward silence and solitude, margin and prayer, Mark captures the same rhythm of Jesus: “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). Margin provides the time needed to rest, refresh, and replenish for the work God calls leaders to. Jesus needed it. Leaders need it.

God’s primary work for leaders in the local church is to trust in Christ (John 6:28-29). A pastor’s job is not to build and grow the local church. God has been doing that for centuries before any church growth manuals were written. The leader’s job is not to counsel marriages back together, repair and encourage broken lives, or bring about life

change through the gospel. Jesus has been healing marriages, fixing brokenness, and doing what only He can do in the hearts and lives of His people. When leaders rest, they practically put their trust in a God who sovereignly works out His purposes. When I sleep, God is working. When I wake up, I join Him in His work. Being reminded of this, the Psalmist writes, “He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand” (Ps 121:3-4).

A biblical theology of rest and margin is one that trusts that God manages just fine without us, which is why Sabbath is woven into the fabric of creation. After working hard on creating everything in existence in the universe, the second chapter of the Bible captures, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Gen 2:1-3). On the seventh day, God rests. It is both simple and common to read this passage and reply, “But I’m leading a growing church that needs my leadership right now.” Yet, in re-reading this passage, there is no clause for leaders in ministry. “Yes, however, I have young children at home and rest isn’t really practical.” And yet again, there is no clause for parents of young children. Mixed into the very heart of creation is a rhythm of work and rest; a rhythm that includes working, creating, developing, and leading, but a rhythm all the same that includes margin, space, and rest. As a pastor and as a leader in the local church, I long to know what rest for God looks like. I have fought to learn what rest looks like in my own life so that in my own sabbath each week I am able to replenish what has been repleted throughout the work week. Sabbath is not and cannot become just a day off. Taking time off is restful, but sabbath is more than that. Sabbath is the margin in the week that brings a full stop to the work. For leaders serving in the local church, it takes

work to sabbath well. There must be preparation for the day of rest so that it does not become a day to take care of whatever did not get taken care of the rest of the week.

The good news of the gospel is that a person's worth and value is not based on what one is able to accomplish, execute, or perform. The gospel reminds leaders along with all humanity that identity is not in what they do, rather it is in who they are. Every human has infinite worth and value apart from what they are able to produce. If leaders do not build margin into their morning and afternoon, if they do not schedule margin into their day and week, then their internal check engine light will illuminate, indicating that the engine of the body has issues, causing a breakdown. As Peter Scazzero writes, "Limits are often simply God's gifts in disguise."²⁴

Jesus invited leaders, followers, and individuals alike to come to him to find rest. Matthew's Gospel captures Jesus' invitation in 11:28-30: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." In this passage, as Frederick Dale Bruner affirms, "Jesus invites those who are having a hard time of it, those for whom life is hard work and who feel overwhelmed. . . . Jesus' invitation goes out to all those for whom life has become a grind, for whom existence is laborious, to those, in a word, from whom the juice has gone out of life and all that's left is the rind."²⁵ It is almost as if Jesus is appealing directly to those who are burned out on life and overwhelmed by the burden of life and work. Imploring the weary in this beautiful passage on the essence of the gospel, Jesus reveals his kingdom truths to the exhausted rather than the enlightened and educated.²⁶

²⁴ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 205

²⁵ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook Matthew 1-12*, vol. 1, *Matthew: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 537-38.

²⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 441.

Because of Jesus' work, thanks to the good news of the gospel, rest for the weary soul is accessible and enjoyable.²⁷ Does this text suggest that work and ministry should be easy and that true followers of Jesus are relegated to lounge on the seaside shores of the gospel? Most certainly not! The work of the ministry is difficult, leaders do hard things, and local church efforts are demanding. Commentator Leon Morris aptly reminds, "This does not mean that they are excused henceforth from hard work. On the contrary, to be a follower of Jesus is to enter a way of life that necessarily involves hard work. But there is nothing of the hopelessness about it that characterizes life for far too many."²⁸ There is no hall pass exemption offered from Jesus in this passage, but rather a companion in the yoke of the work. The equipment that Jesus offers in the yoke is indeed an instrument of work. Bruner writes,

Thus when Jesus offers a yoke, he offers what we might think tired workers need least. They need a mattress or a vacation, not a yoke. But Jesus realizes that the most restful gift he can give the tired is a new way to carry life, a fresh way to bear responsibilities . . . thus instead of offering escape, Jesus offers equipment. Jesus will develop in us a balance and a 'way' of carrying life that will give more rest than the way we have been living.²⁹

Work is still hard (Gen 3:17-18 ESV), but the toils of leading in the local church do not have to lead to burn-out.

Eugene Petersen captures Jesus' proposition poetically when he paraphrases Matthew 11:28-30:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay

²⁷ Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 121-22.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 297.

²⁹ Bruner, *The Christbook Matthew 1-12*, 538.

anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.³⁰

This gospel life rhythm that Jesus offers is one of margin and rest. Working within the gracious appeal of Jesus' yoke is one that includes margin and work. Richard Swenson defines this margin as "the space between our load and our limits. It is the amount allowed beyond that which is needed. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations. Margin is the gap between rest and exhaustion, the space between breathing freely and suffocating."³¹ To survive the demands and rigors of leading in the local church, margin must become a priority. Leaders must recognize that they too are created, not creator. They must realize that as created beings, all humanity is finite, limited, and fallen. The gospel must be the lens through which all leaders view their work in ministry, and, as Brennan Manning admonishes, Christianity doesn't consist primarily in what we do for God, otherwise the good news of Jesus ceases to be good.³²

The leaders interviewed who thrived long term in their ministry all similarly had the characteristic of recognizing their limits, their finitude in the work needed for ministry, and admitted the work of God in their rest was more important than their work in ministry. They exemplified that their theology of ministry necessitates margin and rhythms of rest and work, along with a trust in Jesus' yoke of life and ministry. While busyness is often worn as a badge of honor in American culture, busyness that leads to burnout must be discarded as lethal. George Whitfield, a famous Welsh preacher from the early nineteenth century has been quoted as saying, "I'd rather burn out than rust out in

³⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 1337.

³¹ Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 69.

³² Brennan Manning, *The Furious Longing of God* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 123.

the service of the Lord.”³³ Contemporaries and modern pastors alike have assumed overworking in ministry as noble, but they have come up empty as they have burned out, trading work over rest. Leaders who survive and thrive long-term in ministry see their leadership as a blessing, while those who burnout feel it is a burden. As evidenced by the interviews, leaders who thrive view ministry as an honor, and those who did not survive felt that ministry became a hassle.

Each year, the United States Navy spends hundreds of millions of dollars in fuel and maintenance repairing damage caused by barnacles that attach menacingly to their ships. These barnacles are largely unseen and unwanted passengers that create massive amounts of drag when they attach to the boats. When the Navy takes the time to eliminate this pesky sea creature, they develop a simplicity of sailing that allows for absolute freedom in the waters.³⁴ Surely, there are barnacles on the lives of those leading in the local church context: time consuming and soul crushing weights that create drag, resistance, and burnout in the life of a pastor. There is a better way, found in Jesus and the easy yoke of the gospel.

Leadership Comparison and Pride

We recently got a puppy, a decision that was in-process for over five years. When our family relocated from Tennessee to California, we were forced to give away our beloved dog Libby, a three-pound miniature Yorkshire Terrier. I say forced because the landlord we rented from in California adamantly opposed ownership of any pet. For years, we longed for another dog, but simply could not justify breaking a lease in a home in which we lived. At one point in the waiting season, while on a routine trip to Disneyland

³³ George Whitfield, quoted in Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 61.

³⁴ Warren Duffie, Jr., “Barnacle Busting: ONR-Sponsored Research Targets Ship Biofouling,” October 16, 2016, https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=97157.

with our young kids, our daughter, Addy, was asked by Snow White, “Do you have any animals at your house? I love animals.”³⁵ Without skipping a beat, Addy, who was four and a half years old at that time, replied in a disgusted tone explaining the scandal fabricated by the landlord, “Nope! Marv won’t let us have any animals!” Thankfully, years after the abhorrent demands of a ruthless landlord who carelessly removes the joy of a dog from the life of renters, we picked up an eight-week-old Golden Doodle. This breed is not a recognized breed from the respected American Kennel Club, but is rather a designer breed that is a hybrid mix between a Golden Retriever and a Poodle. This mixture is known extensively as a gentle, kid friendly, hypoallergenic, and non-shedding canine that is about the cutest thing to grace God’s green earth since the inception of Alpaca. This concoction of a canine cocktail is one that has brought joy to many in the United States who do not rent a home from Marv.

While the creation of a hybrid designer dog is cute, the cross breeding in comparison with the life of a leader in the local church is a transfusion amalgamation that cripples and even at times paralyzes a ministry or leader. Comparison was consistently in the mind of those interviewed for this project. From seasoned veteran leaders in the church to fresh graduates of seminary, comparison plagues leaders in the local church. Some may think that comparison is so prevalent today because of the existence of YouTube, Social Media, and viral videos. Previous generations of church goers were not approaching their pastors after delivering a passionate sermon in the pulpit with an off-handed comment intended solely for conversation but one that cut deep into the heart of the shepherd leader who poured over the text for days. Comments like, “Pastor, that was a good sermon, but have you heard Matt Chandler’s sermon on that same text? He really

³⁵ This question is an obvious reference to the beloved Walt Disney classic *Snow White* in which the character of whom the film is named is widely known as an animal whisperer of sorts, commanding the attention and calm presence of a myriad of creatures from the forest where she lives. While we were not talking to the exact Snow White from the movie, she did a great job playing the part and inviting our daughter into the life of a real princess.

brought it!” Innocent passing statements like this prick a certain place in the leader’s mind and heart that open the cage to the ferocious lion of comparison. The conglomerate of comparison is endless, from comparing church attendance to other’s achievements. Comparison shows up in likening opportunities or perks of someone else’s position. It can even permeate to the depths of kingdom impact that one leader is acquainted with versus the impact that another leader is not experiencing, even through gospel faithfulness. The adage most attributed to former President Theodore Roosevelt rings true, “Comparison is the thief of joy.”³⁶

In my interview with a nationally-known pastor who left the ministry early from a moral failure, he regrettably explained that he wished he did not have so many connections and relationships in ministry because each pastor he became connected with became another person to compare himself against. Questions sizzle on the back burner of a leader’s heart that eat away at the gospel impact a leader has in their own context. Questions like, Why haven’t I been invited to speak at a conference? Where is my seemingly unlimited commentary and resources expense account? I would certainly be a better leader if I had the support that he had at that other church. These questions of comparison lead author John Mark Comer to rhetorically ask, “Comparison just eats away at our joy, doesn’t it? Whatever your thing is—parenting, painting, music, entrepreneurship, origami—whatever—there will always be somebody better at it than you. Always. Stings, doesn’t it?”³⁷

The apostle Paul squashed this comparison mentality when he asked the rhetorical question to the churches in Galatia, a group to whom he urged a godly life of true freedom: “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal

³⁶ As many have noted, this quote is not directly attributable in a book, speech, or other published resource. Most resources I looked up attribute this to Roosevelt.

³⁷ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 66.

1:10). Certainly, a leader in the local church would not answer this question out loud by admitting the constant nagging nature of comparison in his own heart, but reality would suggest otherwise. In each of the 11 interviews conducted for this research, 100 percent, 11 out of the 11 pastors, admitted to struggling with the vice of comparison. While Paul does not mention comparison explicitly in the letter to the churches in Galatia, he does include works of the flesh like jealousy, rivalries, and envy (Gal 5:19-21). With the leaders in the local church that were interviewed, these works of the flesh were closely associated with comparison, along with a dash and a sprinkle of competition. These leaders knew with certainty that they were called to model their life after Christ. As Bill Cook and Chuck Lawless affirm, “We know Jesus is the One we are to emulate, but the enemy directs our eyes to somebody else’s popularity, opportunities, and recognition.”³⁸ This competition is not helpful for leaders desiring to thrive throughout a career in the church. What is more damaging is the effect of competition on those who could, even unknowingly, be forced onto the field of comparison. Australian pastor and author Jon Tyson provides a cultural critique when he writes,

In America, the land of competition, the language of success is aggressive and filled with violent images. Here we might describe another’s successes by saying things like “He is killing it” or “She is crushing it” or “He is slaying the competition.” There is truth embedded in that language. To win, we sometimes have to crush those underneath us. And this can move from language to reality when our ambition causes us to compete with those we are called to serve.³⁹

Comparison bred with competition is a destructive force that incapacitates leaders pursuing long-term health in ministry, and it has taken leaders in the church out early.

Growing up with an older brother, competition was fierce, infiltrating the golf course and the dinner table alike. With two boys in a family, competition is present and is so thick you can cut it with a knife. Who washed their hands quicker after working in the

³⁸ William F. Cook III and Chuck Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture: A Biblical, Theological, and Practical Approach* (Nashville: B & H, 2019), 321.

³⁹ Tyson, *The Burden Is Light*, 45.

yard? Which brother could eat more at supper? Did he pull out a nine-iron on the tee box with 165 yards in the par 3? Last one home is a rotten egg. Competition between siblings at times breeds growth, but competition among leaders in the church, according to Rick Reed, “makes comparison a refined byproduct of pride.”⁴⁰ Pride is a vice that C. S. Lewis suggests is competitive at its core:

Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature—while other vices are competitive only, so to speak, but accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone.⁴¹

The aftermath of a prideful life should come as no surprise to even a casual acquaintance of the sayings of Scripture thanks to the popularization of daily motivational and inspirational calendars and quotes that pride leads to destruction and dysfunction. Pride leads to many destinations, but not one of them is a destination someone willfully plugs into their navigational system. King Solomon said it clearly in Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Paul warned similarly in Romans 8:13: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Comparison and competition within the local church and toward other local churches, ministries, and leaders can be a death sentence to the local church leader. Certainly, there are times when comparison is helpful and healthy. Paul compared himself to other leaders as an assessment of his work ethic and ministry when he said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” Paul also compared his present circumstances, difficulties, and sufferings in

⁴⁰ Rick Reed, *The Heart of the Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 15.

⁴¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 122.

light of eternity when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” There are certainly times for comparison in the life of a leader, but those are not in comparison with what others have, the successes that others have experienced, or the opportunities they have. Reed illustrates the function of comparison being like cholesterol: “We can’t live without cholesterol in our bloodstreams; that’s why our bodies naturally produce it. However, the wrong kind of cholesterol elevates our risk of heart disease.”⁴² The heart disease of comparison in achievements, buildings, successes, published works, conference invitations, attendance metrics, giving campaigns, perks of employment, and leadership abilities is a mixture that breeds unhealth and can ultimately lead to an early departure from leadership in the local church.

Competition, comparison, and pride take on different persona in the life of each individual leader in the local church, but conversationally arise in the consummation of numbers in attendance, tithes and giving data, or other numerical forms of measurement. This “obsession with numerical growth,” writes Witt, “has created a generation of pastors who feel like losers.”⁴³ This ambition that often starts with wholesome and kingdom intentions can lead those serving in local churches toward a perfect storm and an inevitable defeat in leadership. Despair arrives as a result of taking pride in the wrong things in ministry. On the flip side, pride can also lead to self-reliance and self-dependence. The successes experienced by leaders in the local church can be just as challenging as seasons of failure. It happened to the Israeli forces when they attempted to capture Ai in their own abilities (Josh 7:2-3). It is found when David took a head count to see what power he had

⁴² Reed, *The Heart of the Preacher*, 18.

⁴³ Witt, *Replenish*, 20.

in the numbers of the Hebrew forces (1 Chr 21:1-6). The disciples did not even bother praying, relying on their own power instead of God's when they took on a demon in Mark 9:14-29. Self-reliance, strategic operation, and innovation of many local church leaders strips the true work of Holy Spirit power that changes lives. A. W. Tozer begrudgingly admits, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."⁴⁴ This appearance of pride through self-dependence invites the enemy to target a leader and deploy the ministry-ending attack evidenced in the early end of a ministry. Cook and Lawless point out, "Overconfidence is a sign of our pride. Prayerlessness is evidence of our self-dependence. Emotional and physical fatigue are part of life. Put the three together, though, and the enemy will not need to look long to see the bulls-eyes on our backs."⁴⁵

The Antidote to Pride and Comparison

Leaders will always fall short in the comparison game, even those at the very top of their game. The leader of 10 would rather be a leader of 100. Those at the helm of a ministry of 1,000 dream of driving behind the wheel of a 10,000-person organization. So, how is it possible to ruthlessly eliminate this maleficence from the heart and mind of a leader? Very simply, God's grace. Recognizing and embracing that while we are not who we ought to be, and we are not who the other leader has become, we are exactly who God created us to be. We must remind ourselves with deep conviction of God's plan in creation to "make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Speaking the truth to ourselves that God created us as "his workmanship" (Eph 2:10) exactly how He wanted us to be in his sovereignty; quirks, warts, and all. In worship, repeating the words of the

⁴⁴ Popular quote often attributed to A.W. Tozer.

⁴⁵ Cook and Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture*, 331.

psalmist in Psalm 139:14: “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” As my grandfather always says, “God made you, and you’re somebody just the way you are. God don’t make no junk.” Knowing the true self and the authentic and biblical identity is an essential weapon in the battle waged with comparison. Steve Graves, writing to his son, captures the essence of why identity is essential: “Becoming settled and confident that you are a one-of-a-kind creation from the genius of God will anchor your life like few other things. It doesn’t free you to change who you are or to justify living however you please; it frees you to discover God and all that He intends for you.”⁴⁶ This is a delicate balance. Graves continues, “Thinking too highly places us above God. Thinking too lowly puts us below humanity. Thinking too highly makes us think we don’t ever make mistakes, nothing is ever our fault, and we have no need for God. Thinking too lowly tells us everything is our fault, that we are a failure, unlovable, and beyond God’s forgiveness.”⁴⁷

Scripture, then, keeps leaders grounded in a true identity defined and created by God. Identity is not found in accomplishments, accumulation of things, achievements, or arrival to a certain place in life. As David G. Brenner so eloquently puts it, “We do not find our true self by seeking it. Rather, we find it by seeking God. For as I have said, in finding God we find our truest and deepest self. There is no true life apart from relationship to God. Therefore, there can be no true self apart from this relationship. The foundation of our identity resides in our life-giving relationship with the Source of life.”⁴⁸ Throughout the pages of God’s Word, followers of Jesus are reminded that their identity was created and designed by the sovereign God from the very foundations of the world. Judith Hougen

⁴⁶ Steve Graves, *41 Deposits: Crucial Conversations for Fathers and Sons* (Nashville: B & H, 2019), 36.

⁴⁷ Graves, *41 Deposits*, 37.

⁴⁸ David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 83.

states, “The love of God is who you are, the compassion of Christ is the only solid identity you will ever apprehend.”⁴⁹

From the leaders’ interviewed for this project, surviving for the long game requires throwing off the comparison game. As one leader commented, he had to quit looking at everyone else’s buildings, numbers, and successes, and focus on the ministry God had blessed him with so extravagantly. By simply looking at the list of leaders interviewed for this project who survived, four of the eleven do not have any social media accounts. By way of contrast, the leaders who did not survive, nine out of the eleven are active on social media. In a follow up conversation with a thriving leader, he commented that he has seen how social media breeds comparison in every aspect of life; from parenting to leadership, social media compares the appearance of others living the life you wish you had. Leaders must brutally eradicate comparison from their minds and hearts, laying aside their pride to embrace the truth of who they are in Christ. Hanz Finzel says that in order “to end well, we must not get too wrapped up in our own indispensability. Humility is the key to finishing well and passing the torch on to our successors.”⁵⁰ Reminding themselves that they are not indispensable is the beginning of shaping a gospel identity manifested in cultivating humility.

This life and leadership-altering humility was embodied in John the Baptist, a leader whose sole purpose was to prepare the way for the promised Messiah exemplified humble leadership. His very appearance exuded a life that was not built on looking better, showing himself worthy, or even attempting to compete in the clothing department of ministry leaders in his day (see Zech 13:4; 2 Kgs 1:8). Matthew provides a glimpse by way of a brief biographical text in Matthew 3:1-4:

⁴⁹ Judith Hougen, *Transformed into Fire: Discovering Your True Identity as God’s Beloved* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 107.

⁵⁰ Hans Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013), 189.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. (ESV)

When this first century leader, who knew his purpose and his identity, was presented with the comparison trap, he masterfully redirected his followers toward his authentic calling.

The ministry of Jesus had begun to take root, and followers of John the Baptist were beginning to compare, compete, and contrast crowd sizes. John 3:26-30 says,

And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Humility on display recognizes and readily admits the place of the person, and the place of Christ. James Hamilton notes, “The Baptist’s reply to the concern that all are going to Jesus is a study in humility and salvation history. The Baptist’s humility comes from his understanding of himself, Jesus, and the roles they each play in God’s plan.”⁵¹ This order of the position of humanity under the position of the Redeemer is a critical placement in the thriving of local church leadership. Without Jesus, the leader in a local church has no purpose. As Paul writes in Romans 11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever” (ESV). Humility grows in the heart of a leader by a constant reminder of who Jesus is and where he is placed in the divine order of the human life. Jesus himself displayed this great humility that Paul celebrates in Philippians 2:6-11:

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly

⁵¹ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *John-Acts*, ESV Expository Commentary, vol. 4 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 83.

exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John Stott once said, “In every step of our Christian growth and maturity, and throughout every aspect of our Christian obedience and service, our greatest foe is pride and our greatest ally is humility.”⁵²

Humility’s handiwork in the leader’s ministry is shown by the leader owning the responsibility of fault, finitude, and fleshly desires in their life. No story captures how a leader owns personal responsibility like the transfer of a satellite uplink dish. In 1989, Learfield Communications was transitioning their operations from Centertown, Missouri, to a new facility in Jefferson. They hired Carson Helicopter Company to transport their satellite dish from one location to the next. Shortly after takeoff, a malfunction sent the dish free falling a few hundred feet to the ground where it smashed into pieces upon impact. An investigation revealed a weak bolt in the wreckage by the chief engineer of the project. Instead of blaming physics or engineering, the chief engineer Charlie Peters framed the bolt as a reminder that he took personal responsibility for the accident. Accompanying the framed bolt was the phrase “own the bolt,” which became a companywide mantra for displaying humility, courage, and learning by owning mistakes.⁵³

Leaders must humbly own responsibility for the mistakes, failures, and limited nature of their abilities. Likewise, the Christian must brutally abolish any thought or idea that success is birthed exclusively through the talents of an individual. This also provides practical assistance in the fight against comparison, knowing that another’s achievement is equally born of God’s direct involvement.

If the list of names of the leaders interviewed for this project were published, it would read like a who is who among great church leaders. Many of the names of their

⁵² John Stott, “Pride, Humility, and God,” Sovereign Grace Online, September/October 2000, http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/sgo/v18vno5/prt_pride.html.

⁵³ “When Satellite Dishes Fall from the Sky” accessed May 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fEU6K7bams>.

churches have been published in *Outreach Magazine* for the fastest growing churches in America. Their names appear regularly on conference websites as featured keynote speakers and their sessions are widely attended by the thousands. To suggest they are talented leaders would be an understatement, but when combined with the fact that they passionately love what they do is a solid one-two punch. This great strength, however, created a shadow side that led to a great fall in a handful of the leaders interviewed. The truth is that giftedness and talent in ministry cannot be mistaken for spiritual maturity. Ministry activity is no replacement, regardless of how successful, for personal spiritual discipline.

“At least I’m not like they are” (Luke 18:11-12) was the common reply of religious leaders in the time when the Gospels were written. The first-century version of a current childhood playground come-back, “You’re not my mom!” Both are attempts to deflect the judgement, but both reflect a lack of looking inward to see if there is any micrometer of validity in the words used. When the religious leaders leveraged this statement, they were relying on their adherence to a moral code beyond that ascribed in the Old Testament law. Their lives had been surrounded and inundated with law upon law.⁵⁴ Pharisees created multiple layers of boundaries and protective measures to prevent the possibility of potentially breaking one of God’s laws, but in so doing they inadvertently established a man-made system of religion, and like the snares mentioned previously, that lead to pride or despair.

The better way is the way of humility; a way that leads to a career-long journey of thriving in the local church, and this way comes by example of Jesus. Jesus humbly lived the life no one else could, and died the death everyone else should have. Because of that, leaders can confidently know what thriving looks like through humility.

⁵⁴ Giving the Tennessee Volunteers a 5-0 start to the 2016 football season, Joshua Dobbs threw a 43-yard Hail Mary pass that was caught in the end zone by Jauan Jennings as time expired from the clock. Matt Green, “Tennessee Volunteers: The Dobbs-Nail Boot,” accessed May 24, 2020, <https://southboundanddown.com/2017/07/21/tennessee-volunteers-dobbs-nail-boot/>.

Secret Sin

Sin, whether public or private, among the people of God always causes pain. Sin in the camp of the people of God has been a reoccurring theme from the Old Testament through current day. Secret sins of leaders in churches today hurt the leader, the family they love, and the churches they are called to lead. Secrecy among those interviewed who failed out of the ministries they led was as common as the Los Angeles Dodgers choking in the playoffs. The existence of secret compartments of their life permeated every downward spiral of the leaders interviewed. Of the leaders interviewed for this project, without exception, secrecy was a vital part of their leadership demise. For some it was sexual sin, for others it was financial reticence, an addiction, a past hurt that was left unaddressed, or an off-the-radar established place of freedom from the pressures of life under the microscope of a church. Whatever the secret, they fiercely protected it to the point where hiding it became another full-time job. Within most conversations I had for the research interviews on this project, the leader constantly battled the internal feeling of hypocrisy. And the slippery slope of secret sin produced a snowball summation of stifling sickness. The voice in one of the leader's mind and heart constantly whispered, "You're such a fake, a massive fraud, and a horrible hypocrite."

Chris Webb writes,

Hypocrites to Jesus' contemporaries, were people who pretended to be something other than they really were; they assumed masks, faces, opinions, and emotions not their own. The behavior and words they exhibited on the stage came not from the heart and soul but from the writer's script. These play-actors lacked authenticity and integrity. They were sham people.⁵⁵

Secret sin has a way of bringing paranoia to the heart and mind of its user. It also has a way of leveraging fear to both its advantage and the leader's demise. Secret sin forces people to become someone they are not. Actors regularly become someone they are not to perform in a role for the stage or screen. Pastors often become someone they are not

⁵⁵ Chris Webb, *God Soaked Life: Discovering a Kingdom Spirituality* (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity, 2017), 62.

and someone who is radically different from the leader on the platform to cover up a habit, hang-up, or hurt. But rest assured, leaders in today's local churches are not the first ones to employ another character in public.

Long before Daniel Craig masterfully took on the character and persona of one of modern culture's most widely known secret agents, James Bond, people were assuming lead roles on the stage of religious life. This hypocrisy was a prominent hallmark of Jesus' interaction with the actors in his day, the scribes and Pharisees. The scene is a great crowd that Jesus' disciples are part of when Jesus begins teaching, and the stage is the gospel of Matthew. Jesus had previously taken a harsh stance against the fake lifestyle of these groups, and had publicly embarrassed them. This time, his intensity grew, and his words were not minced. The scribes were the professionals who were experts in the field of interpretation of the Torah, while the Pharisees were theological experts of the Torah. While these two groups should have been well-versed in the implications of Scripture and theology, their knowledge was surface level. What they believed had not changed or shaped the way they lived. Jesus was not having it. He charged, "They preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger" (Matt 23:3-4). Hypocrites and stage actors were those who pretend to be someone they are not. Jesus continues,

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. (Matt 23:13-14, 23, 25, 27)

In a series of seven consecutive woes, Jesus rebuked the private lives of those with authority. Jesus' indignation is understandably coming to bear because the leaders who ought to have been living according to God's Word were instead living a double life. Jesus saw through to who they really were, and as Cook and Lawless explain, "God sees secret

sins as plainly as we see things at high noon.”⁵⁶ Based on outward appearances, no one would have guessed it, but Jesus attacked it at its core, berating them for appearing clean and clear on the outside, but full of filth and death on the inside. By way of magnifying their internal and otherwise secret sins, Jesus called out the heinousness of hypocrisy of the first-century religious leaders, and consequently calls out the secret lives of those in leadership today. Scribes and pharisees then did not intend to be holy; rather, just to look holy with actions that did not match their beliefs and teachings.

The secrets leaders keep define the life they live. Like the scribes and pharisees of Jesus’ day, corruption, scandal, and addiction from within have one outcome—death, decay, and depravity. Lest pride creep into the heart of anyone, Andy Farmer levels with humanity when he says, “We all face temptations to look for some kind of escape or diversion when dealing with stress and disappointments of life. There are healthy ways to cope, things like sports, music, hobbies, and social activities. But there are unhealthy escapes as well.”⁵⁷ Those unhealthy escapes pave the pathway to self-destruction. No leader wakes up one day from a good night’s sleep to proclaim that they want to become an axe murderer or psychopathic serial abuser. However, this is the very nature of secret sin; it starts in a minor and trivial manor and progressively expands until it is a public failure.

Two of the leaders interviewed shared strikingly similar stories of eventual resignation. What started small by way of a passing comment to a younger female morphed into an extramarital affair through a series of seemingly innocent interactions. Secret sin inevitably grows, expands, and deepens until it completely engulfs and overtakes its host. The great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, describes the process: “They have ventured into sin where they thought the stream was shallow, and, fatally deceived by its depth,

⁵⁶ Cook and Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture*, 322.

⁵⁷ Andy Farmer, *Trapped: Getting Free from People, Patterns, and Problems* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 103.

they have been swept away by the strength of the current to that cataract which is the ruin of such vast multitudes of the souls of men.”⁵⁸ Exploring the patterns, habits, and secrets of those interviewed as well as the more public display of moral failure, Cook and Lawless accurately posit, “The enemy did not have to fight hard to take them down, as they already had one foot in the camp of infidelity in the first place.”⁵⁹ However, there is grave danger in keeping great secrets. The manipulation may work for a season, but as Moses warned about all sin in Numbers 32:23, “Behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.” Secret sin is simply open scandal in Heaven. While the temptation to hide comes naturally at birth because of Adam and Eve’s original sin, the balance will come due. Farmer warns, “Secret escapes are enticing because they provide both intense pleasure and immediate distraction at the same time. But what begins as an occasional pursuit of release and relief can escalate into a life-dominating compulsion to indulge or purge yourself in private orgies.”⁶⁰ Not intended as a moment of crying wolf or over exaggerating an effect, instead, the warning is to take serious the situation in which secret sin can leave a leader.

One of the more common secret sins falls under the umbrella of addiction. Neuropsychologist and counselor Edward Welch defines addiction as “bondage to the rule of a substance, activity, or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don’t bring repentance, and leading to further estrangement from God.”⁶¹ This slippery slope of addiction must be faced with an honest and vulnerable acceptance of reality. Of the men interviewed, three quickly positioned their secret sin as a struggle and not an addiction. While this project

⁵⁸ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Little Sins,” April 17, 1859, The Spurgeon Center, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/little-sins#flipbook/>.

⁵⁹ Cook and Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture*, 334.

⁶⁰ Farmer, *Trapped*, 103.

⁶¹ Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet at the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 35.

never sought to classify or diagnose addiction in the lives of those interviewed, a disservice would be rendered by not posing the possibility that what some leaders classify as a struggle in secret is actually addictive behavior. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) explains, “Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.”⁶² Addictions must be dealt with appropriately to be eradicated. Where addictions and secret sins align in their treatment is within the context of community.

Secrecy leads to isolation, and isolation is fertile ground for the exponential expansion of death and decay. This is where confession and community cultivate an inner and outer complexion of continuity and health in the life of a leader. Isolation produces a parting of the waters of the public and private life, the platform presence from the personal composition of a leader. Webb challenges, “As long as we continue to try to hide our brokenness from ourselves, from others, and from God, we cannot expect any serious change or healing in our lives.”⁶³ This certainly is not Webb’s original thought or creative answer to a life well lived. King Solomon, writing with the wisdom and truth of God, said in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12,

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

⁶² American Society of Addiction Medicine, “Definition of Addiction,” accessed March 18, 2020, <http://www.asam.org/for-the-public/definition-of-addiction>.

⁶³ Webb, *God Soaked Life*, 65.

Men and women were not designed to live life on their own. God never created humanity with the expectation of perpetual isolation, segregated from others. People are better when together. The reality is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it,

The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.⁶⁴

The Antidote to Secret Sin

Friendship is the grace of God in the person of a loving, caring, companion to walk through life's good times and bad. Practically speaking, however, friendship is often overlooked or ignored by leaders. Witt writes, "For some reason expanded leadership influence often goes hand in hand with increased relational isolation."⁶⁵ A sermon often preached from the pulpit is regularly not embraced in practice. Cook and Lawless admit, "Leaders of God's church intellectually know the significance of the body of Christ, but we too seldom build strong friendships within that body."⁶⁶

There must be a better way, a way that leads not to isolation but to mutual gospel involvement in the lives of leaders, members, and Christians alike. The better way involves embracing and inviting wisdom, encouragement, rebuke, and challenge from other gospel-minded men and women. Proverbs 11:14 captures this idea succinctly: "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety." Leaders must ruthlessly eradicate secrecy in their life, their marriage, and their ministry if they want to survive and thrive in ministry. Thriving in leadership is simply impossible without inviting the voices, wisdom, and leadership of others into the leader's life.

⁶⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954), 23.

⁶⁵ Witt, *Replenish*, 53.

⁶⁶ Cook and Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture*, 320.

When I was in high school, our school district required that a foreign language be studied at minimum for two out of the four years of the student's education. Since I wanted to become a dentist and was looking at going into the medical field, I was advised by family, friends, and school counselors to take Latin. My teacher, Mrs. Warren had to have known that high school students would find the study of the ancient language of Latin dull and boring. So, each week, she would put catchy or humorous Latin phrases on the board for us to engage with the language in a fun and memorable way. The phrase that stood out most was the one she wrote in each of her students' yearbooks, *sine cera*, which was a phrase that means "without wax." This phrase was traditionally etched into pottery and sculptures by the artist to show the integrity of their work. Centuries ago, dishonest sculptors, in an attempt to save money and time, would cover up flaws and cracks in their work with a wax before painting and selling them, without disclosing the flaws to the buyer. After time and a little bit of sunshine, the flaws and cracks would be revealed as the wax melted away, causing the piece to leak, become unusable, or eventually disintegrate. So, when honest sculptors finished their pieces, they would label it with the statement *sine cera* to signify the integrity and sincerity of their work. Mrs. Warren's encouragement and challenge to her students remains etched into my yearbook and my mind. She reminded her students of the value and importance of authenticity in life in a world of inconsistency, secrets, and fakes.

A phrase often repeated by children who have fallen victim to classroom secrets goes, "Secrets don't make friends, and friends don't make secrets." Secrets are not helpful in childhood, and they are crippling when present in leaders' lives. There is a better way, as commended by Jesus, King Solomon, and the leaders interviewed for this project. It is a way that I personally have adopted, inviting a Christian therapist, a soul-care coach, friends, and wise leaders into my life for the purpose of revealing blind spots, holding me accountable for my choices and actions, and living a life consistent with Scripture. As Paul commended believers in Philippians 1:27, "Only let your manner of life be worthy

of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

Faithful

This manner of life that Paul admonishes believers to embrace is the better way. In a word, it is a *faithful* life. This life is only possible when anchored to Scripture and committed to others. I was on a flight back home with my wife from a quick weekend trip to Portland, and was about twenty minutes into the movie *Gravity*, featuring George Clooney and Sandra Bullock. I am a space nerd and I have seen this movie several times previously, but I love the gripping drama and edge of your seat action involved miles above Earth’s atmosphere. As with cinematic thrillers like *Gravity*, the suspense builds when a problem enters the plot. In the case for Clooney and Bullock’s characters, this life and death quandary arises where gravity does not exist. With space debris hurling in a gravity-less atmosphere, they quickly realize the danger of being in space without being tethered to something secure. The reality is, leaders in the local church are unlikely to be orbiting in space, so they will not have to navigate the atmosphere without gravity. However, the principle remains true whether one is an astronaut or a leader in the local church. If one is not tethered to something solid in life and ministry, then one is sure to float off into oblivion until gone. Jefferson Bethke suggests, “[Humans] are meant to live with our feet on the ground, so to speak. To be attached and connected to something that can anchor us in the dirt.”⁶⁷ That anchor in the life of a leader is the same anchor that Jesus employed in his battle with Satan in the wilderness for forty days (Matt 4:1-11): the Word of God. As leaders tether their life and ministry to Scripture, God’s grace provides a biblical community of believers with which to commune for the purpose of growing in

⁶⁷ Jefferson Bethke, *To Hell with the Hustle: Reclaiming Your Life in an Overworked, Overspent, and Overconnected World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), xiii.

godliness. These two separate entities come together for a beautiful mixture that enables leaders to serve like Jesus, love like Jesus, and lead for the long term.

When put in a position of leadership, Daniel was met with immediate resistance by those he was given authority over by King Darius. Those satraps experienced great jealousy for his position, the leadership oversight and authority he had, and the success he experienced. In a plot to usurp his authority and influence, they decided to do a bit of private investigation, instigating detective work to find something to fault Daniel for. However, they came up empty. Daniel 6:4 says, “Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.” This is the life example of the faithful calling God places on every leader in the local church.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has led to what could become the phrase of 2020, possibly even the entire decade: “social distancing.” In social distancing, the Centers for Disease Control has recommended that individuals maintain a distance of six feet or more between oneself and people outside of one’s own home.⁶⁸ This recommendation is to help slow the spread of Covid-19. This recommendation was taken further by the overwhelming majority of states in the continental US, barring the gathering of ten or more people together. In these state mandates, along with either a stay-at-home or shelter-in-place order, there were requirements for local churches to adjust their regular gathering with their church family to an online presence. The vast majority of churches willingly submitted to these requests and mandates knowing that to shift in-person gatherings at a local church level to online services was the most loving thing to do. It was the loving thing to do because this helped “flatten the curve” by lowering the amount

⁶⁸ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Social Distancing,” accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>.

of exposure to this novel virus in public settings. The most loving thing followers of Jesus could do was to shift gathering in person to gathering virtually. Churches around the nation and around the world began leveraging software like Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Facebook Live as hosting platforms for the gathering of their local congregation.

For leaders in the local church to serve well, lead well, and live well, the most loving thing a leader can do is live their life in a manner consistent with Scripture. John captured this beautifully when he wrote in 1 John 4:7-8: “ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Leaders live the faithful life.

CHAPTER 5

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

It was a staple in the community for generations. Parents and grandparents shared stories of their experiences in this landmark and widely recognizable part of the community. Long before it became a predominant feature in the city, a hearty history of forging through treacherous territories was written about it, waging war against the social and global challenges of its day, and leading the way in doing good both at home and around the world. While more recent history does not include adventurous and innovative stories of prominence, generations can recount stories of their experience in it. Seen as a constant for people both in and around the community, hundreds of thousands stepped foot into it following generations past. Children were invited to a life-shaping event of an overnight in it. Annual festivals thrown by the community featured it, and books were written commemorating and celebrating it. What was once pictured with elaborate, ornate, and exquisite sails and flags that carried its message around the world is now featured adorning a yellow hazmat boom to provide containment for any spillage resulting from its downfall. After generations of historic success, an article in the local newspaper headlines the demise of “The Pilgrim Tall Ship of Dana Point.” The tragic news came when leaders in the Ocean Institute say that the damage is likely beyond repair leaving many in the community at a loss for words. While this news would be understandable due to an accident, an outside force that was out of the control of those overseeing its maintenance, or a blatant and general disregard for the good of the ship, the sinking of

“The Pilgrim” was instead due to a very small and slow leak that officials believed and communicated publicly to be under control.¹

The headline reporting the tragic annihilation of a once burgeoning and rich historical destination could have just as easily been about the local church. There have been headline news reports capturing the tragic closure of local churches due to the moral failure of a leader, splits between factions in a congregation, and the slow death of community churches. The impact of a leader’s slow leak in character might not be immediately seen by those stepping foot into the local church they pastor, but it could just as easily lead to the future sinking of the ship by a reckless captain. Ed Stetzer speaks to the impact of the life that is not consistent with Scripture: “Few can doubt that public perception of Christianity, Christians, and evangelicals has taken a big hit in the last few years. To be fair, Christians have done a lot to contribute to this decline. From unloving posts on social media to unwise political comments by their leaders, Christians have certainly earned some of the frustration.”²

There is good news even in the bad headlines of ministry burnout and failure. God accomplishes life change and kingdom impact even in spite of leadership failure. Standing in Caesarea Philippi with his closest disciples with him, Jesus proclaimed, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). There are no conditions on Jesus’ spoken truth that building the church is His prerogative. Jesus has done and continues to do great things in the middle of great brokenness. The Old Testament captures this reality with the story of God sovereignly deciding to use the pagan Persian King Cyrus to accomplish deliverance for the people of Israel. In times of great political and spiritual need, God anointed a shepherd for his people through a leader

¹ Erika I. Ritchie, “Ocean Institute’s Tall Ship Pilgrim Sinks in Dana Point Harbor, Orange County Register,” March 29, 2020, <https://www.ocregister.com/2020/03/29/ocean-institutes-tall-ship-pilgrim-is-sinking-in-dana-point-harbor/>.

² Ed Stetzer, *Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World Is at Its Worst* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018), 57.

who did not even claim to be a follower of God. Derek Thomas notes, “God is sovereign, and He can employ whomever He likes to accomplish His purposes.”³ This is encouraging truth, knowing that the enormous failures of man will not thwart the sovereign grace and purpose of God. God himself said in Isaiah 45:7: “I am the Lord who does all these things.” There is hope to be discovered in the truth of God’s sovereignty in all things.

God’s goodness is not seen only in his sovereign purpose accomplished in the broken leader, but through his amazing grace in the burned out leader. Kintsugi is Japanese art that takes broken and shattered pieces of pottery and puts them back together by using a special lacquer that has been dusted with the finest metals on earth.⁴ Using powder from gold, silver, and platinum in the compound, the artist places the broken pieces together to create an even more beautiful piece than before. Just because the pottery was broken does not mean it is useless. The tattered pieces are not discarded as useless or garbage, but rather are preserved for a beautiful new piece of art. Instead of simply covering over the brokenness and pieces that were shattered, the artist painstakingly rebuilds the new pottery to be used and celebrated for years to come. Throughout the interviews conducted for this project, I was able to experience first-hand how God put pieces back together after a season of brokenness. Two of the pastors interviewed are even back serving in local churches after a period of repentance and restoration.⁵

³ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Strength for the Weary* (York, PA: Maple Press, 2018), 39.

⁴ Kelly Richman-Abdou, “Kintsugi: The Centuries-Old Art of Repairing Broken Pottery with Gold,” September 5, 2019, <https://mymodernmet.com/kintsugi-kintsukuroi/>.

⁵ In the two leaders who are currently back serving in the local church, they spent an extended period of time in owning responsibility, full transparency with either their elder or executive board, repentance, and regular biblical counseling therapy both individually and with their spouse. They also worked on restoration in leadership with an external group who served as a personal executive board, outside consultants, or other trained coaches in restoration.

Thriving in Long Term Ministry

There is hope, and there is a better way. The way of thriving in ministry is the way of living faithfully. The copious number of headlines involving moral failure or burnout are exponentially growing. At one point or another in a ministry context, either from a distance or in close proximity, everyone in a church has seen pastors, ministry leaders, and at times even colleagues endure failure, experience heartbreak, or a vicious betrayal that cut so deep that they leave ministry altogether. Of course, on this side of eternity, those stories will continue to be written. Despite the challenges and failures prevalent today, other stories can be written as well. These are stories I have been able to witness personally.

As I conclude this project, I am personally grateful for these subsequent stories that have shaped me and impacted my ministry. Stories abound of a long and thriving ministry like that of Rick Warren, who recently celebrated forty years of faithful leadership through strenuous and tragic circumstances. After publishing the wildly successful book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren could have ridden the white horse off into the sunset of an early and well-deserved retirement. He did not retire, but instead continues on a journey of faithful leadership in the local church. Even after the tragic death of his son, Matthew, Warren and his wife, Kay, committed to continue to lead and even give a voice to those struggling with mental health issues. In addition, there is the faithfulness and integrity of Eric Thomas, who did not cave to the pressure of the voices telling him to not baptize a recent convert due to racism. Other people, like Ron Edmondson, faithfully led a declining church that others had given up on to see healthy church growth. Also, Victor Manuel Madrigal Jimenez, a church planter in Panama, faithfully preaches and teaches the gospel in the most difficult parts of Central America. He and his family open up their home to over one hundred children three times a week to feed them a nutritious meal that they otherwise would not get. This meal keeps these children off of the streets and out of gangs, but this ministry that Jimenez leads faithfully will likely never make the headlines of any denominational mission report. There are stories such as that of Bob Hartman, who has

for decades faithfully led a ministry that takes the truths of the gospel to the basements of the former Soviet Union, teaching college students how to share and defend the faith in this sector of the world.

Faithfulness is shown through the many godly leaders of great character that I have been fortunate enough to rub shoulders with through my life and ministry career. I got to experience first-hand from the front row the deep character and integrity of my dad. Though not a pastor, nor trained in seminary, he led our family and serves in their local church to this day. Throughout his life and leadership at the local government level, he honored the Lord through faithfully leading what God called him to. The success of this project will be measured in the generations of leaders to come but is also evidenced by the leaders who have gone before.

None of these stories will be written for future generations if change does not happen. The change suggested in this project, such as soul care, personal spiritual disciplines, cultivating a personal integrity, developing character, humility, and others—none of these survival techniques and character traits happen by accident. These leadership qualities do not arrive osmotically through seminary training or ministry experience. Scott Sauls recognizes the trend toward competency in the culture when he writes,

In America, credentials qualify a person to lead. In Jesus, the chief qualification is character. In America, what matters most are the results we produce. In Jesus, what matters most is the kind of people we are becoming. In America, success is measured by material accumulation, power, and the positions that we hold. In Jesus, success is measured by material generosity, humility, and the people whom we serve.⁶

Leaders survive with great success when their lives are faithful to the gospel.

Leaders cannot wait until things are bad. They cannot just sit back and watch others crash and burn. Like driving, one must learn the art of defensive movement in a forward direction. I remember the moment we strapped our first-born child into our

⁶ Scott Sauls, *From Weakness to Strength: 8 Vulnerabilities That Can Bring Out the Best in Your Leadership* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2017), 21.

vehicle to return home after a healthy delivery at our local hospital. I remember taking the elevator from the fifth floor, to where our top safety rated SUV was parked. As I hooked the 2011 “best car seat” awarded Chico into its base in the back seat, I questioned all of the five-star reviews that I read for hours deliberating the mode of transportation for our newborn. As my wife and I quietly closed the door and assumed our normal position in the driver’s and passenger’s seats, I subconsciously wondered if the doctors and nurses knew what they were doing letting this brand new human being go home with me as her father. I had no clue what I was doing, but I remember cautiously utilizing the defensive driving tactics that I learned from my parents as I newly recognized just how recklessly everyone else was driving. To survive and thrive in ministry for the long term, it is “mission critical” for leaders to pursue godly and biblical wisdom. As Daniel Estes writes, “Wisdom, then, has a defensive goal of the protection of the learner from the harmful influences that could easily lead to disaster.”⁷ Estes goes on to say, “More than mere attention to instruction is in view here. The learner must accept the instruction as his continual possession. He must both hear and heed what he is taught. He must respond to what he has received.”⁸

This project also emphasized the importance of doing life with others. I have heard it said from conference stages and from pastoral studies that ministry is lonely work. The evidence of loneliness is all around and there have even been times that I have felt this personally. But overwhelmingly present with leaders who thrived was having friends, mentors, coaches, therapists, and others in their life. Scott Thomas and Tom Wood emphasize this when they write, “Every church leader needs a coach. And every church

⁷ Daniel J. Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 4, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 79.

⁸ Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 141.

leader needs to be coaching other leaders.”⁹ Ministry is hard. Leading in the local church can be overwhelming and even become a burden too heavy to bear. Between the difficult conversations during pastoral counseling and the tragic life circumstances where pastors arrive in their members’ lives, the day-in and day-out duties of a leader in the local church involves weighty times. Because of this, leaders absolutely need others to turn to. My personal journey with mentors, coaches, a therapist I see every other week, a soul care coach I meet with monthly, and leaders who provide encouragement and maintain accountability has proven that I need the wisdom and partnership of others in my life. In Southern California, the interstate provides drivers several lanes as options in which to drive. Across the nation, the left lanes or lanes are reserved for passing, but Orange County gives drivers the chance to utilize the HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lane. This lane is reserved for those with energy efficient vehicles and drivers with passengers. The minimum requirement is only one additional passenger to qualify for driving in the fast lane of the HOV. Yet, day by day, the HOV lane remains usable for driving at a reasonable pace and speed, while the seven other lanes slow at times to a complete halt. I have been asked multiple times why people do not just find a friend to carpool with, and each time I am asked, I think about the same commentary for those in ministry. Why would leaders in the local church not just find someone else to walk through life with? If survival is the goal, then leaders simply cannot settle for isolation and being alone. If thriving in ministry is the goal, then leaders should surround themselves with wisdom and accountability; enveloped by people who love Jesus, the church, and the leader.

In his now legendary and infamous trial by jury in the public eye, O. J. Simpson was quoted as saying, “I think I’ve been a great citizen.”¹⁰ While the world may never

⁹ Scott Thomas and Tom Wood, *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 23.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Toobin, *The Run of His Life: The People v. O.J. Simpson* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 58.

know the truth being questioned at this trial, this quote is seemingly ironic coming from a man on trial for murder. Looking at the life leaders, reading this project, one may think they can survive without the internal and self-work suggested. But I want to implore leaders to not wait until there is a crisis or until there is a temptation, or until they have had it and you are already burned out. It is too late to put out a house fire if the home is fully ablaze. It is ridiculous to think that a fire extinguisher would put out the raging beasts of a structure-consuming inferno. Start this work now. On the contrary, it is also a mistake for a fire alarm to ring if there is not a fire. In the home we have rented for the past five years, there have been two or three dozen nights, at two or three o'clock in the morning when the smoke alarms have malfunctioned, creating chaos in our house and waking everyone up for no reason. After informing our landlord each time the system erroneously alarmed, we are still having problems. To keep our family asleep at night, we have removed the smoke alarms from a common area with little chance of a fire. For leaders in the local church, removing smoke alarms is the first step in beginning to remove check points for fires in their own life or ministry. As much as they may wake someone up at inopportune times, as often as they may slow good work down, and as much maintenance may be required to keep them in operative order, keep them plugged in. Use these suggestions as a launching point for health in your life. Leadership is not about wishful thinking. Leading is about determined doing.

Our family was gifted a second-hand television set when we got married. It was only recently that we purchased a new TV after being married over twelve years. We went to Walmart with the intent of getting a good TV without breaking the bank, and we did it. We got a beautiful picture on an Ultra High Definition television for under \$300. Upon getting the television home, I eagerly cut the tape and pulled out the television to my wife's despair. "Aren't you going to read the instruction manual?" my sweet wife asked. So, I slowed down a bit, and grabbed the television manual that consisted of over 280 pages. Granted, some of the pages were a repeat of prior information in another

language, but the manufacturer took all of this time to write a manual to tell me to plug the television into an electrical socket to get it to work.

When it comes to thriving long term in local church leadership, there are not step-by-step instructions. There is no playbook detailing exactly what to do in every situation faced. Leaders will not find steps on how to create the best worship experience, or build a sustainable small groups ministry, or how to become a viral video sensation. Dayton Hartman writes, “We have far too many unqualified, untested men filling our pulpits and being vested with pastoral authority because they are gifted and believe they have been called to the ministry. We don’t need more men who are gifted; we need more men who are qualified.”¹¹ My hope for this project has been that readers and leaders would be encouraged with the steps necessary to survive and thrive in ministry, remaining qualified for the long term.

Reflection

As I reflect back on the years spent studying for and researching this topic, I am deeply grateful for the leaders who were transparent in their interviews with me. Although anonymous, they provided deeply beneficial insight into the issues involved in their departure from ministry. The strength of this research came from the honesty and vulnerability of those interviewed. While some may hold the perspective that the interview methods taken were a weaker format of research, the anonymity provided intimate information that otherwise may not have been available. This anecdotal research and writing proved invaluable in analyzing signs of moral failure and burnout.

This interview research contributed to several key findings, summarized succinctly below:

¹¹ Dayton Hartman, *Lies Pastors Believe: 7 Ways to Elevate Yourself, Subvert the Gospel, and Undermine the Church* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 47.

1. There are warning signs pointing to an eventual moral failure and burnout.
2. There are protective measures that leaders can employ to serve as boundaries in the fight against burnout and moral failure.
3. Living life in the context of authenticity and vulnerability with trusted people is key to thriving.
4. It is possible to thrive in ministry and survive the rigors of local church work.

The limitations self-imposed by this project did not allow me to research in a deep and significant way the repentance and restoration of leaders, but I would highly suggest further research in this area. Building upon the foundation of health, I would recommend research to delve into the waters of creating a process of repentance and restoration. What specific steps lead to the restoration of a leader who has fallen? What process can a leader who has experienced genuine burnout walk through to emerge back into ministry refreshed and replenished to finish well?

Instruction in Scripture has been unpacked throughout the course of this project: instruction on a life well lived, details on how to thrive in ministry, and plays to run in the game. So, dear friend, go and live well. You will not be perfect, no one is except Christ. But you can run the race well. Be able to say with confidence like the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Strive for a well-integrated, healthy life and ministry. My friend and fellow leader, be faithful.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEWS

For the purpose of this project, after thorough discussions with my doctoral supervisor and my cohort professor, I decided to utilize qualitative research through a series of one-on-one interviews. These interviews were conducted under the agreement of complete anonymity, which had a dual purpose. First, the anonymous nature of the interviews protected those interviewed while also protecting their children and the local church that they were part of. I didn't want to conduct research that could potentially have a negative effect on individuals, families, or local churches. While the eleven men interviewed admitted that their actions had an adverse impact on all three realms of their life, my desire was not to perpetuate the problem, but rather to discover potential landmines by looking back on the moral failure or burnout.

In preparation for the interviews to be conducted, I worked with several high capacity leaders that I have a personal friendship with. These leaders graciously provided a connection point to their very deep rolodex of leaders in the local church. My desire was to create a scope of research that spanned both large mega churches and small churches. I hoped to not only provide insight from this variety of churches, but to also show that moral failure and burnout aren't limited to pastors in the limelight. Not only did I work with my friends to connect with leaders who are no longer serving, I leveraged their extensive experience and godly wisdom to develop a strategic and concise list of questions based on the following research questions:

- What are the common factors leading to pastoral burnout?
- What are the common factors leading to a long term thriving pastoral ministry?
- Under what conditions are leaders in the local church more likely to experience pastoral burnout?

- What is the relationship between a pastor who is not leading within their gifting/calling and pastoral burnout?
- What are the common factors leading to a moral failure of a pastor?
- Under what conditions are leaders in the local church more likely to fall due to moral failure?
- What is the relationship between a pastor who has secret sin and eventual burnout?

While these research questions were not posed to the leaders, they formed the basis for the questions asked to the interviewees.

The interviews also and subsequently included eleven leaders who not only survived long term in ministry, but had a thriving and healthy ministry. In preliminary conversations with my supervisor, we decided the best route for these interviews would be to mirror the other interviews by providing complete anonymity, even though there was no moral failure or burnout. The purpose for the anonymous interviews on the positive side was to maintain consistency across the interviews and to protect the longevity of this project from the potential of future failure or burnout. While these leaders have successfully led for more than 25 years in the local church, sin still lurks in the shadows of every leader's life on this side of eternity. Peter, a hero of the faith and a model to leaders today warned of this in his epistle when he wrote,

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:1-11 ESV)

This appendix includes the list of questions asked to each respondent. The interview was conversational and delivered by video call or phone call, and as such,

included follow up questions or subsequent questions for the purpose of clarity and detail. The follow up questions are not provided, but the clarity gained is. The responses are in some cases direct quotes, but for the most part are provided in a way that provides benefit for the research and anonymity for the leader. In discussion with my supervisor, we agreed that using best judgement would be the most helpful approach in this appendix. Also provided is a simple chart plotting responses in a visual way so that the major themes that emerged during research interviews could be clearly identified.

Long-Term Thriving Leaders

1. *Can you please, to the best of your ability, explain what kept you emotionally and spiritually healthy for the extent of your long career in ministry?*
 - Daily Disciplines, which included time in the Word that was not in preparation for a sermon or other writing
 - I spent time every day in Scripture. First Word God's Word, Last Word God's Word. Morning and Evening rhythm.
 - I had regular time with a therapist that included meeting with him when things were tough, frustrating, and difficult as well as time with him when things were great.
 - Elimination of comparison. I fought hard to not watch what other pastors were doing in order to compare their success or their abilities with my own.
 - Self-awareness and emotional intelligence were helpful in understanding how I am wired and how I respond/react in certain situations or seasons.
 - Good, solid friendships.
 - True and constant accountability kept me from falling. People who would get in my facemask.
 - I used all of my vacation days that my church provided. I never had carry over vacation days year to year.

2. *What was your typical schedule in a busy month? What was your typical schedule in a slower month? How often would you take a sabbath in any given month? Did you use the vacation time provided by your church?*
 - I worked 5 days a week. My sabbath was on Friday when I rested and refreshed. My day off was on Saturday and was family time.
 - Sabbath on Monday. I found that if I took my sabbath on Friday, I would still be thinking and doing sermon prep.
 - I used most of the vacation time provided.

- Minimum vacation time away during one trip was 2 weeks. If I vacationed for 1 week, I over-worked before and over-worked after.
- I worked six days a week because we have a Saturday night service.
- I worked a typical 8-5 work week and took Saturday off. I wanted to be available to be with our church family during the week, when they needed follow up. I didn't even have my phone in my pocket on Saturdays.

3. *To what extent were you involved in additional ministry opportunities outside of your local church? (conferences/camps/events, itinerant speaker, writing, social media, adjunct teaching)*

- I committed to my family that I would be gone no more than 7 nights away and out of town per year.
- I only accept camp preaching requests during the summer months.
- I strive to write a book once every 5 years.
- I write a book every 10 years.
- I don't speak at conferences or other churches. This is a personal ministry philosophy for me.
- My social media is only family stuff. Pictures and updates for our family around the country to keep up with us.

4. *What areas of your life were hidden from your church? (Follow Up questions included inquiries into pornography usage, inappropriate conversations with members of the opposite sex, use of social media)*

- I wouldn't say there are hidden areas of my life from the church because there was nothing hidden from our elders. I didn't publically and vulnerably share every detail of every struggle and temptation from the pulpit, but I did with a select group of men.
- I have accountability software installed on every device that I use, even on our family ipads. This way, there is no way for me to access inappropriate content online.
- Nothing is hidden from our board of directors.
- Nothing.
- My wife and my accountability partners have full access to my laptop, my email, and my text messaging.

5. *Have you ever been confronted with areas of concern in your leadership or ministry?*

- Yes, my preaching was growing dull and boring and the elders addressed it.
- Yes, I actually invite our board to do a deep and invasive look into my life and leadership. They bring areas where I need to grow each year during my annual review.
- I have a performance evaluation at the end of each summer with our leadership team.

- Not about areas of concern, but areas where I need to grow and develop.
 - No
6. *How many significant friendships did you have that you could trust? How many of those were internal within your church?*
- I have a group of 5 men that I could pick up the phone and call at any hour of any day and they would pick up. 3 of these guys were part of the local church I pastor
 - 35. I have our small group, which is 12. I have our elders, which is 10 men. I have friends both inside and outside the church. I have deep friendships around the world.
 - 2 friends that I trust with anything and everything in ministry.
 - 7 families in our small group who know the good and the difficult of ministry. They are committed to our family by being committed to the gospel.
7. *What area would you encourage leaders to focus on for a long term and thriving ministry?*
- Self-Awareness, Soul Care, Spiritual Disciplines
 - Time in scripture, get a good Christian therapist, take time off
 - Sabbath, rest, retreat
 - Eliminate comparison, eliminate busy, eliminate secrets
 - Trusting Friends, Robust marriage, personal disciplines
 - Exercise for physical health, scripture for spiritual health, and accountability for mental health.
 - Invite critique, accept responsibility and ownership, give away leadership.
 - Quit comparing, Start meditating daily, Invest in your family.

Leaders Who Did Not Survive

1. *Can you please, to the best of your knowledge, explain what led to your termination, resignation, or early exit from ministry in the local church?*
- Burnout. I was so spent emotionally, physically, and spiritually that my wife had to pack up my office.
 - Moral failure,
 - secret sin,
 - Had an inappropriate relationship with a staff member,
 - sexual infidelity,
 - emotional affair through digital platforms.
 - I couldn't stop comparing my ministry with other leaders I knew and some I had never met. I wanted so bad to be where they were, accomplish what they did, and be seen by who they were that I compromised ethically.
 - Addiction and alcohol.

- It started small with complimenting a woman and morphed into a full blown relationship. The steps by themselves felt innocent, but when put together, developed into very inappropriate behaviors.
2. *What was your typical schedule in a busy month? What was your typical schedule in a slower month? How often would you take a sabbath in any given month? Did you use the vacation time provided by your church?*
- I would work all hours of the day, constantly available on my phone. When my wife went to sleep, I would resume work, reply to emails, write sermons or another book.
 - I took a sabbath once a quarter. Not because that was all the church offered, but because there was so much work to be done. I vacationed wherever my speaking gigs took me, but rarely unplugged from the work of the ministry.
 - I would take a day out of the office; I never really took a day off. I rarely stopped.
 - I would try to take a sabbath every week. Was successful at times.
 - I would work 10-12 hours throughout the week. Write sermons on Saturdays while my wife and kids were having fun. Arrive to church by 5:30a on Sundays, and leave by 5:30p. Business, board, committee, deacon and other meetings throughout the week, typically home by 7p and some nights 9:30p.
 - Even on my sabbath or my vacation, I was working.
3. *To what extent were you involved in additional ministry opportunities outside of your local church? (conferences/camps/events, itinerant speaker, writing, social media, adjunct teaching)*
- Spoke at churches around the country 8-10 times a year.
 - I wrote a book a year. Was under contract to write 3 more until I was terminated.
 - I wrote for a Christian organization for their online blog.
 - Frequent tweeting and social media.
 - Podcast, blog, and writing for online sources.
 - Taught Bible classes through online undergraduate
 - None
 - 2-3 Youth Camps during the summer
4. *What areas of your life were hidden from your church? (Follow Up questions included inquiries into pornography usage, inappropriate conversations with members of the opposite sex, use of social media)*
- Accessed pornography 3-4 times a week.
 - Carried an online conversation with an old girlfriend for 3 years.
 - Texts with multiple women, sexting, flirting.

- Drinking. They knew that I had alcohol with a meal, but they didn't know that I would drink excessively outside of meals.
- Pornography
- How insecure I was.
- Everything outside of the church office and weekend platform was a secret. I was a completely different person.
- When I was stressed or experienced a disappointment, I would go to my escapes of pornography, addiction, and disfunction.
-

5. *When were you confronted about the areas of concern? How did that confrontation happen?*

- It started with being confronted about not being as present in the office. I worked out in a gym a lot, and would go twice a day.
- Confronted when I got caught.
- When I was showing signs of burnout and depression.
- Once before I resigned. Felt blindsided.

6. *How many significant friendships did you have that you could trust? How many of those were internal within your church?*

- Looking back, I had plenty, but none that I actually used. They were a mix of both internal and external.
- I had no one that I felt like I could trust.
- There were guys who I would say were friends, but none that I confided in.
- None
- I had significant friendships but not authentic friendships
- I had no one that I could trust. I was insecure and paranoid that someone would find out who I was behind closed doors.

7. *What were some alternate or subsequent emotions were you experiencing that led to your eventual burnout?*

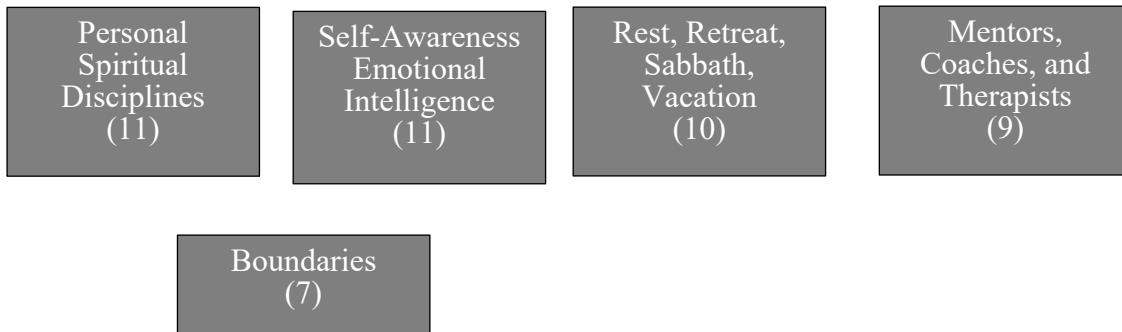
- I was deeply depressed. I didn't admit it then, but now that I've spent time in therapy, I realize that I was depressed.
- I felt like I didn't measure up. That I wasn't enough, so I performed until I was enough for that week.
- I never felt good enough.
- Unknown.
- I felt the burnout, so I tried to mute it and keep it at bay through addiction.

8. *What accomplishments did you experience through your season of burnout?*

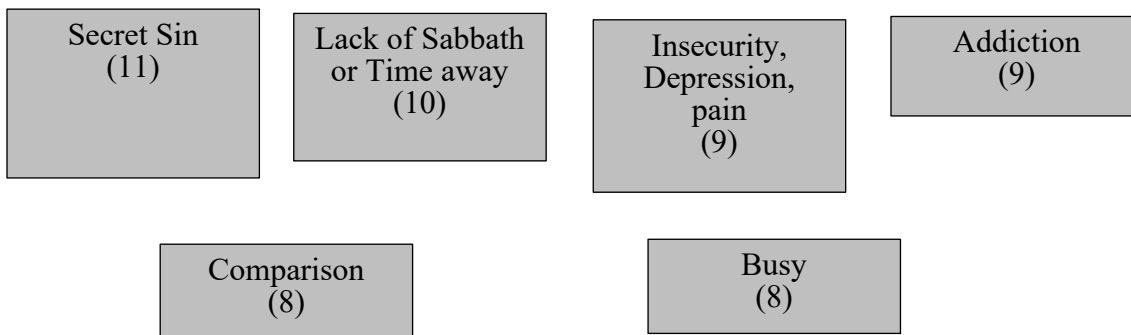
- Best-selling author
- Spoke at the top conferences around the nation.
- My preaching and communication skills improved.
- One of the top on the list of fastest growing churches.
- Make no mistake, I was getting things done, but nothing significant enough to go through burnout that I did. I kept hearing in my mind, “You’re such a fake, a massive fraud, and a horrible hypocrite.” Secrets were my ruin. I constantly lived in fear of being found out.

Through these qualitative interviews, I sought to synthesize, aggregate, and homogenize the gathered data in a way that honored anonymity while at the same time helped put flesh on the bones of burnout and moral failure in leadership.

Surviving and Thriving



Burnout and Moral Failure



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adib, Rabieh. "The 5 Balls of Life: Coca-Cola's Ex-CEO Bryan Dyson's Speech on Love, Work, Family, and Friendship." March 8, 2016.
<https://shinecoachingbarcelona.com/en/5-balls-of-life-brian-dyson-speech/>.
- American Society of Addiction Medicine. "Definition of Addiction."
<http://www.asam.org/for-the-public/definition-of-addiction>.
- The Barna Group. *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age*. Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016.
- _____. *The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders Are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity*. Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2017.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018.
- Baxter, Richard. *The Reformed Pastor*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1656.
- Beeley, Christopher A. *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Benner, David G. *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004.
- Bethke, Jefferson. *To Hell with the Hustle: Reclaiming Your Life in an Overworked, Overspent, and Overconnected World*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019.
- Bird, Drew. *The Leaders Guide to Emotional Intelligence: Understand and Develop Your EQ for Maximum Leadership Impact*. San Bernardino, CA: CreateSpace Independent, 2016.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954.
- Boyd, Brady. *Addicted to Busy: Recovery for the Rushed Soul*. Colorado Springs: Cook, 2014.
- Bradberry, Travis, and Jean Greaves. *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. San Diego, CA: TalentSmart, 2009.
- Brafman, Ori, and Rom Brafman. *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.
- Brooks, David. *The Road to Character*. New York: Random House, 2015.

- Brooks, David “The Sandra Bullock Trade.” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2010. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/30/opinion/30brooks.html>.
- Bruner, Frederick Dale. *Matthew: A Commentary*. Vol. 1. *The Christbook Matthew 1-12*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Burk, Denny. *Ephesians-Philemon*. ESV Expository Commentary, vol. 11. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Burns, Bob, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie. *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Suffering and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- _____. *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Translated by T.A. Smail. *Calvin's Commentaries*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964.
- Cannon-Green, Lisa. “Why 734 Pastors Quit (and How Their Churches Could Have Kept Them).” *Christianity Today*, January 12, 2016. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/January/why-734-pastors-quit-how-churches-could-have-kept-them.html>.
- Carson, D. A. *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.
- _____. *Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Social Distancing.” Accessed July 2, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>.
- Clinton, J. Robert. *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988.
- Collins, Jim. *How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.
- Comer, John Mark. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2019.
- Conquer Series. “15 Mind-Blowing Statistics about Pornography and the Church.” Accessed August 14, 2019. <https://conquerseries.com/15-mind-blowing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church/>.
- Cook, Alison, and Miller Kimberly. *Boundaries for Your Soul: How to Turn Your Overwhelming Thoughts and Feelings into Your Greatest Allies*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018.
- Cook, William F., III, and Chuck Lawless. *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture: A Biblical, Theological, and Practical Approach*. Nashville: B & H, 2019.

- Cordeiro, Wayne. *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2009.
- Crouch, Andy. *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk, & True Flourishing*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016.
- Davis, Scott. "College Runner Celebrates Like Crazy before the Finish Line, Loses Race by a Foot." *Business Insider*, April 13, 2015. <https://www.businessinsider.com/oregon-runner-loses-race-celebrating-too-early-2015-4>.
- DeYoung, Kevin. *Crazy Busy: A Mercifully Short Book About a Really Big Problem Behavior*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Dickson, David. *The Elder and His Work*. Edited by George Kennedy McFarland and Philip Graham Ryken. 1883. Reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004.
- _____. *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap Between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Doriani, Daniel M. *1 Peter*. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014.
- Duffie, Warren, Jr. "Barnacle Busting: ONR-Sponsored Research Targets Ship Biofouling." October 13, 2016. https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=97157.
- Earley, Justin Whitmel. *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019.
- Eldridge, John. *Get Your Life Back: Everyday Practices for a World Gone Mad*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020.
- Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993.
- The Enneagram Institute. "The Riso-Huson Enneagram Type Indicator." Accessed January 18, 2020. <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/rheti>.
- Estes, Daniel J. *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 4. Edited by D. A. Carson. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997.
- Farmer, Andy. *Trapped: Getting Free from People, Patterns, and Problems*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016.
- Ferguson, Sinclair. *Maturity: Growing Up and Going On in the Christian Life*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2019.
- Finzel, Hans. *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York: HarperCollins, 2018.
- Freeman, Emily P. *The Next Right Thing: A Simple, Soulful Practice for Making Life Decisions*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 2019.

- Fuller Institute of Church Growth. "1991 Survey of Pastors." Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1991. Quoted in H. B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman. *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who've Been There*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Gallup. "Clifton StrengthsFinder." Accessed January 18, 2020. <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/strengthsfinder.aspx>.
- Gardner, Paul. *1 Corinthians*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Edited by Clinton E. Arnold. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.
- Geiger, Eric, and Kevin Peck. *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*. Nashville: B & H, 2016.
- Godin, Seth. "Say Yes to Everything." March 12, 2020. <https://seths.blog/2020/03/say-yes-to-everything/>.
- Graham, Billy. "What's 'the Billy Graham Rule?'" July 23, 2019. <https://billygraham.org/story/the-modesto-manifesto-a-declaration-of-biblical-integrity/>.
- Graves, Steve. *41 Deposits: Crucial Conversations for Fathers and Sons*. Nashville: B & H, 2019.
- Grudem, Wayne. *1 Peter*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009.
- Hamilton, James M. *John-Acts*. ESV Expository Commentary, vol 9. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.
- Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Harris, Dana M. *Hebrews*. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough. Nashville: B & H, 2019.
- Hartman, Dayton. *Lies Pastors Believe: 7 Ways to Elevate Yourself, Subvert the Gospel, and Undermine the Church*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017.
- Hayes, Andy. "Trousers and Skill All That Remains after Poacher Eaten by Lions and Trampled by Elephant." April 8, 2019. <https://news.sky.com/story/poacher-eaten-by-lions-after-being-trampled-by-an-elephant-11686959>.
- Helm, David R. *1-2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ's Sufferings*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Henderson, Jeff. *Know What You're For: A Growth Strategy for Work, An Even Better Strategy for Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.
- Hiestand, Gerald, and Todd Wilson, eds. *Tending Soul, Mind, and Body. The Art and Science of Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019.
- Hope for Mental Health. Accessed January 2, 2020. <http://hope4mentalhealth.com/>.
- Hougen, Judith. *Transformed into Fire: Discovering Your True Identity as God's Beloved*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002.

- Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Irwin, Tim. *Derailed: Five Lessons Learned from Catastrophic Failures of Leadership*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009.
- Jesus Bible*. NIV ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.
- Jobes, Karen H. *1 Peter*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- Kraft, Dave. *Leaders Who Last*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Kruse, Colin G. *2 Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015.
- Kubicek, Jeremie. *Making Your Leadership Come Alive: 7 Actions to Increase Your Influence*. New York: Howard Books, 2011.
- _____. *The 100X Leader: How to Become Someone Worth Following*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2019.
- Laniak, Timothy. *Shepherds after My Own Heart*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2006.
- LaRue, John C., Jr. "Pastors at Work: Where the Time Goes." *Leadership Journal*. January 3, 2001. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2001/january-online-only/cln10103.html>.
- Lawrence, Kevin N. *Your Oxygen Mask First: 17 Habits to Help High Achievers Survive and Thrive in Leadership and Life*. San Bernardino, CA: Lioncrest Publishing, 2017.
- Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.
- _____. *Virtue and Vice: A Dictionary of the Good Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.
- Lillback, Peter A. *Saint Peter's Principles: Leadership for Those Who Already Know Their Incompetence*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2019.
- Loehr, Jim. *The Only Way to Win: How Building Character Helps You Achieve More and Finding Greater Fulfillment in Business and Life*. New York: Hyperion, 2012.
- London, H. B., Jr., and Neil B. Wiseman. *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who've Been There*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- MacArthur, John. *The Book on Leadership*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004.
- Malinowski, Erik. "'Professor Splash' Sets World Record for High Dive into Shallow Pool." March 18, 2011. <https://www.wired.com/2011/03/professor-splash-world-record/>.
- Manning, Brennan. *The Furious Longing of God*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009.

- Marshall, I. Howard. *1 Peter*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 17. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009.
- Martin, Ralph. *New Testament Foundations*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.
- Mathis, David. *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.
- McChesney, Chris, and Sean Covey. *The 4 Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals*. New York: Free Press Publishing, 2016.
- McIntosh, Gary L. *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- McKeown, Greg. *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*. New York: Crown Publishing, 2014.
- McKnight, Scot. *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christofromity in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019.
- Miller, Donald. *Building a Story Brand: Clarify Your Message so Customers Will Listen*. New York: Harper Collins, 2017.
- Mohler, R. Albert. *Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012.
- _____, ed. *Essential Reading on Leadership*. Louisville: Southern Equip, 2018.
- _____. *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*. Christ Centered Exposition Commentary. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017.
- _____. *More Faithful Service*. Louisville: SBTS Press, 2016.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel according to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992.
- Murray, David. *Reset: Living a Grace Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.
- Myers & Briggs Foundation. "Take the MBTI Instrument." Accessed January 18, 2020. <https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/take-the-mbti-instrument/>.
- Nieuwhof, Carey. *Didn't See It Coming: Overcoming the Seven Greatest Challenges That No One Expects and Everyone Experiences*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2018.
- Noewen, Henri. *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.
- _____. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- Osborne, Grant R. *Matthew*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament, vol. 1. Edited by Clinton E. Arnold. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

- Osborne, Larry. *Lead Like a Shepherd: The Secret to Leading Well*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018.
- Petersen, Anne Helen. "How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation." *BuzzFeed*, January 5, 2019. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/annehelenpetersen/millennials-burnout-generation-debt-work>.
- Peterson, Eugene. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.
- _____. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987.
- Psychology Today*. "Burnout." <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/burnout>.
- Quarles, Charles L. *Matthew*. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough. Nashville: B & H, 2017.
- Reed, Rick. *The Heart of a Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019.
- Reeder, Harry L., III. *3D Leadership: Defining, Developing and Deploying Christian Leaders Who Can Change the World*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2018.
- Richman-Abdou, Kelly. "Kintsugi: The Centuries-Old Art of Repairing Broken Pottery with Gold." September 5, 2019. <https://mymodernmet.com/kintsugi-kintsukuroi/>.
- Ritchie, Erika I. "Ocean Institute's Tall Ship Pilgrim Sinks in Dana Point Harbor." *Orange County Register*, March 29, 2020. <https://www.ocregister.com/2020/03/29/ocean-institutes-tall-ship-pilgrim-is-sinking-in-dana-point-harbor/>.
- Ryken, Philip Graham. *1 Timothy*. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007.
- Sanders, J. Oswald. *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*. Chicago: Moody, 2007.
- Sauls, Scott. *From Weakness to Strength: 8 Vulnerabilities That Can Bring Out the Best in Your Leadership*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2017.
- Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Leaders: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *1 Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018.
- _____. *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. The New American Commentary, vol. 37. Nashville: B & H, 2003.
- Scroggins, Clay. *How to Lead in a World of Distraction: Maximizing Your Influence by Turning Down the Noise*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.

- Somaiya, Ravi. "Matthew Warren, Son of Influential Minister, Dies at 27." *The New York Times*, April 6, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/us/rev-rick-warrens-son-matthew-commits-suicide.html>.
- Spurgeon, Charles. *Lectures to My Students*. Philadelphia: Pantianos Classic, 2018.
- _____. "Little Sins." April 17, 1859, *The Spurgeon Center*. Accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/little-sins#flipbook/>.
- Stetzer, Ed. *Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World Is at Its Worst*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018.
- Stinson, Randy, and Dan Dumas. *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*. Louisville: SBTS Press, 2011.
- Storms, Sam. *Hebrews-Revelation*. ESV Expository Commentary, vol. 12. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Stott, John. *The Message of 2 Corinthians*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988.
- _____. "Pride, Humility, and God." *Sovereign Grace Online*, September/October 2000. http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/sgo/v18vno5/prt_pride.html.
- Swenson, Richard. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004.
- Swoboda, A. J. *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018.
- Thomas, Derek. "A Solemn Charge." Sermon at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, June 10, 2007. http://fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Derek's_SERMONS/Acts/24a_acts_20_13_38.htm.
- _____. *Strength for the Weary*. York, PA: Maple Press, 2018.
- Thomas, I. D. E. *Puritan Golden Treasury*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977.
- Thomas, Scott, and Tom Wood. *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Thompson, Curt. *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*. Chicago: Tyndale House, 2010.
- Thompson, Derek. "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable." *Atlantic*, February 24, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/>.
- Tidball, Derek. *Ministry by the Book: New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Leadership*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.
- The Times Editorial Board. "Following the Billy Graham Rule Doesn't Make You Noble. It Makes You a Sexist Dinosaur." *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-billy-graham-rule-sexist-20190716-story.html>.

- Toobin, Jeffrey. *The Run of His Life: The People v. O. J. Simpson*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Tripp, Paul David. *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Tyson, Jon. *The Burden Is Light: Liberating Your Life from the Tyranny of Performance and Success*. New York: Multnomah, 2018.
- Vanderbloemen, William, and Warren Bird. *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Webb, Chris. *God Soaked Life: Discovering a Kingdom Spirituality*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017.
- Welch, Edward T. *Addictions: A Banquet at the Grave*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001.
- “When Satellite Dishes Fall from the Sky.” Accessed May 12, 2020.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fEU6K7bams>.
- White, David. *God You and Sex: A Profound Mystery*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2019.
- _____. *Sexual Sanity for Men: Re-Creating Your Mind in a Crazy Culture*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2012.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.
- Wilson, Jared C. *The Pastor’s Justification: Applying the Work of Christ in Your Life and Ministry*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Wilson, Todd. *Tending the Soul, Mind, and Body: The Art and Science of Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019.
- Witt, Lance, *Replish: Leading from a Healthy Soul*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.
- World Health Organization. “Rolling Updates on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).” Accessed March 30, 2020. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>.
- Worldometer. “COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic.” Accessed July 2, 2020.
<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>.

ABSTRACT

SURVIVING LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Brandon Ross Reed, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Matthew D. Haste

This project is designed to serve pastors, ministry leaders, and other leaders in the local church with the necessary habits, life patterns, and character development tools in order to survive leadership in the local church. By exploring common reasons leaders get out of ministry or are shown out of local church ministry, this project unpacks causes of burn-out, moral failure, phasing out, and more to give a clear picture of reasons some leaders do not survive leading in the local church.

Chapter 1 provides context, rationale, and direction for why leaders do not survive by exploring both personal and professional issues. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological support for leading in a local church, and ways to survive the difficulties of the battle in the trenches for a leader's character. Chapter 3 delves into the theoretical and sociological support for how leaders can develop healthy rhythms, strong support systems, a self-care plan, and boundaries necessary for survival. Chapter 4 provides the framework of a life well lived and how leaders leads themselves personally, interpersonally, and professionally within the context of the local church. Chapter 5 wraps up the discussion by evaluating the feasibility of leaders in the current cultural context to survive leading in the local church.

VITA

Brandon Ross Reed

EDUCATION

BA, Regent University, 2007

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Student Pastor, First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Virginia, 2004-2008

College Pastor, Grace Community Church, Clarksville, Tennessee, 2009-2012

Campus and Teaching Pastor, Grace Community Church, Clarksville,
Tennessee, 2009-2015

Lead Pastor, Saddleback Church-Rancho Capistrano, 2015-