

## **The Emotionally Healthy Leader:**

### **How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World**

By Peter Scazzero

Once when traveling through Dubai, we passed the building site of a future skyscraper. They hadn't yet built anything above ground but were carefully constructing a solid foundation deep beneath the surface.

In a leader's life, the same thing needs to happen. There needs to be work done deep beneath the surface. Leadership is hard, and learning to be aware of and handle the many emotions that come with leadership builds a solid foundation.

You can only successfully grow upward as a leader to the extent you have grown in your depth as a leader. "The first and most difficult task we face as leaders is to lead ourselves. Why? Because it requires confronting parts of who we are that we prefer to neglect, forget, or deny." To grow thyself, know thyself. This book will help you on that journey.

**This summary is comprised of the quotes that were most helpful to me and should help give a good overview of the key ideas.**

In reflecting on his life and ministry, author Peter Scazzero has experienced four radical changes in his life.

- 1: From Agnosticism to Zealous Christian Leader
- 2: From Emotional Blindness to Emotional Health
- 3: From Busy Activity to Slowed-Down Spirituality
- 4: From Skimming to Integrity in Leadership

The 4th change led to writing this book.

He said:

"Because I felt overwhelmed by too many things to do and attend to (sermons, pastoral decisions, leadership training events, crises among staff and congregants), I rushed and skimmed my way through some of the more difficult responsibilities of leadership.

- I avoided meetings I knew would be hard or stressful.
- I massaged the truth when being completely honest was too uncomfortable.
- I avoided performance evaluations when someone was doing a poor job.

- I failed to ask difficult questions or speak up when something was clearly wrong.
- I walked into important meetings without having taken time to be clear on my goals and agenda, or to be thoughtful and prayerful about decisions.
- I failed to allow adequate time to follow through on my commitments, which meant I dropped a lot of balls and made it difficult for staff to do their best work.
- I struggled to take the time I needed for silence and abiding in Jesus during intense planning and meeting days.
- Perhaps worst of all, I consistently disregarded the painful indicators that my life and my ministry might not be going as well as I hoped or imagined.”

“I wanted someone else to come in and “get the house in order,” to do the dirty work of hiring, firing, redirecting, and leading the church through the painful changes before us so I could continue to focus on the enjoyable things like preaching and teaching. But in choosing to avoid these difficult leadership issues, both my integrity, and that of our church, was at stake. I finally admitted the truth to myself: the greatest deterrent preventing New Life Fellowship Church from becoming what God intended was me. Once again, I had to take a hard look beneath the surface of my life — this time at the hidden mass of pain and failures related to my role as a leader. As I began to consider the changes I needed to make, I soon realized that applying the principles of emotionally healthy spirituality to the tasks of leadership and building a healthy organizational culture would be far more complex than I had imagined.”

“Leadership is hard. It involves suffering. But there is a big difference between suffering for the gospel as Paul describes (2 Timothy 2:8) and needless suffering that is a result of our unwillingness to honestly engage difficult and challenging leadership tasks.”

## **Chapter 1: The Emotionally Unhealthy Leader**

“The emotionally unhealthy leader is someone who operates in a continuous state of emotional and spiritual deficit, lacking emotional maturity and a ‘being with God’ sufficient to sustain their ‘doing for God.’”

“*Emotional deficits* are manifested primarily by a pervasive lack of awareness. Unhealthy leaders lack, for example, awareness of their feelings, their weaknesses and limits, how their past impacts their present, and how others experience them. They also lack the capacity and skill to enter deeply into the feelings and perspectives of others. They carry these immaturities with them into their teams and everything they do.

*Spiritual deficits* typically reveal themselves in too much activity. Unhealthy leaders engage in more activities than their combined spiritual, physical, and emotional reserves can sustain. They give out for God more than they receive from him.”

### **Four Characteristics of the Emotionally Unhealthy Leader**

## **1. They Have Low Self-Awareness**

“Emotionally unhealthy leaders tend to be unaware of what is going on inside them. And even when they recognize a strong emotion such as anger, they fail to process or express it honestly and appropriately. They ignore emotion-related messages their body may send — fatigue, stress-induced illness, weight gain, ulcers, headaches, or depression. They avoid reflecting on their fears, sadness, or anger. They fail to consider how God might be trying to communicate with them through these “difficult” emotions. They struggle to articulate the reasons for their emotional triggers, their overreactions in the present rooted in difficult experiences from their past.”

## **2. They Prioritize Ministry over Marriage or Singleness**

“Emotionally unhealthy leaders tend to compartmentalize their married or single life, separating it from both their leadership and their relationship with Jesus.”

## **3. They Do More Activity for God than Their Relationship with God Can Sustain**

“The notion of a slowed-down spirituality — or slowed-down leadership — in which their doing for Jesus flows out of their being with Jesus is a foreign concept.”

## **4. They Lack a Work/Sabbath Rhythm**

“Emotionally unhealthy leaders do not practice Sabbath — a weekly, twenty-four-hour period in which they cease all work and rest, delight in God’s gifts, and enjoy life with him. . . Or they may make no distinction between the biblical practice of Sabbath and a day off, using “Sabbath” time for the unpaid work of life, such as paying bills, grocery shopping, and errands.”

# **Four Unhealthy (and Unspoken) Commandments of Church Leadership**

## **Unhealthy Commandment 1: It’s Not a Success Unless It’s Bigger and Better**

“What constitutes failure in the eyes of the world isn’t always a failure in the kingdom of God. For example, Jesus’ stunning success in teaching and feeding the 5,000 at the beginning of John 6 is followed just a few paragraphs later by a corresponding numerical failure: “At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him” (John 6:66 NLT). Jesus didn’t wring his hands and question his preaching strategy; he remained content, knowing he was in the Father’s will. He had a larger perspective on what God was doing. Success isn’t always bigger and better.”

“How then do we resist obeying this bigger-is-better commandment? The only way, I believe, is to slow down our lives for a relationship of deep, loving union with Jesus. . . , and to have a few trusted companions who protect us from self-deception.”

## **Unhealthy Commandment 2: What You Do Is More Important than Who You Are**

“We cannot give what we do not possess. We cannot help but give what we do possess.”

“Jesus’ identity was firmly rooted in being the beloved of the Father before he ever engaged the doing of public ministry. In the first thirty years of his life, Jesus did nothing extraordinary.

Nonetheless, before his public ministry began, the Father said to him, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).”

### **Unhealthy Commandment 3: Superficial Spirituality Is Okay**

“I assumed pastors, administrative staff, missionaries, board members, and para-church workers routinely devoted themselves to nurturing a deep, personal relationship with Jesus. I assumed wrong. Now I don’t assume anything. Instead, I ask. I ask leaders to tell me about how they are cultivating their relationship with God.”

“I love the Lord’s instruction to Samuel, “The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (see 1 Samuel 16:7). In other words, we don’t look simply on the outside; we are concerned about the heart, beginning with our own.”

### **Unhealthy Commandment 4: Don’t Rock the Boat as Long as the Work Gets Done**

“Too much of contemporary church culture is characterized by a false niceness and superficiality. We view conflict as a sign that something is wrong, so we do whatever we can to avoid it. We prefer to ignore difficult issues and settle for a false peace, hoping our difficulties will somehow disappear on their own. They don’t. For years, I turned a blind eye to staff issues I should have been engaging promptly and directly — everything from sloppy preparation, lack of approachability, judgmentalism, failure to spend time with God, marriages that were not doing well, to name a few. My first concern, so I reasoned, was to keep the church moving, and wading into the muddy waters of conflict and hard conversations felt like lurching to an abrupt and unwelcome stop. But as we all learn sooner or later, I discovered that I couldn’t build God’s kingdom with lies and pretense. I found out the things I ignored eventually erupted into much bigger problems later. We have to ask the painful, difficult questions we prefer to ignore or the church will pay a much larger price later.”

## **Learning to Be an Emotionally Healthy Leader Takes Time**

“God sees your present leadership context and challenges and he knows what you need — not only to meet the challenges but to grow into a stronger leader because of them. . . You can expect God to send key people and resources your way at just the right time to help you take your next step.”

### **The Five-Stage Process of How We Learn and Change**

1. Awareness: “Slowing down is an interesting idea.”
2. Ponder: “Help me understand more about slowing down.”
3. Value: “I really believe it is important for everybody to slow down.”
4. Prioritize: “I am shifting my entire life around as I slow down to be with Jesus.”
5. Own: “All my decisions and actions are based on this new value.”

## **Part 1: The Inner Life**

“Leading a church, an organization, or a ministry that transforms the world requires more than the latest leadership strategies and techniques. Lasting change in churches and organizations requires men and women committed to leading from a deep and transformed inner life. We lead more out of who we are than out of what we do, strategic or otherwise. 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.”

“Building a ministry, a church, or a nonprofit is a lot like building a skyscraper. First you dig down for the foundation, and then you build up. The foundation in this case is your inner life. The quality and durability of the building — the team or organization you lead — will be determined by how carefully this foundation is laid.”

“Mature spiritual leadership is forged in the crucible of difficult conversations, the pressure of conflicted relationships, the pain of setbacks, and dark nights of the soul.”

### **Chapter 2: Face Your Shadow**

"The first and most difficult task we face as leaders is to lead ourselves. Why? Because it requires confronting parts of who we are that we prefer to neglect, forget, or deny.”

One example: “His outgoing, friendly personality, along with his good listening skills, camouflage his allergic reaction to any kind of conflict.”

#### **What is the Shadow?**

“Your shadow is the accumulation of untamed emotions, less-than-pure motives and thoughts that, while largely unconscious, strongly influence and shape your behaviors. It is the damaged but mostly hidden version of who you are. The shadow may erupt in various forms. Sometimes it reveals itself in sinful behaviors, such as judgmental perfectionism, outbursts of anger, jealousy, resentment, lust, greed, or bitterness. Or it may reveal itself more subtly through a need to rescue others and be liked by people, a need to be noticed, an inability to stop working, a tendency toward isolation, or rigidity. Aspects of the shadow may be sinful, but they may also simply be weaknesses or wounds. They tend to appear in the ways we try to protect ourselves from feeling vulnerable or exposed. This means that the shadow is not simply another word for sin.”

#### **You Are More than Your Shadow**

##### **The Consequences of Choosing to Ignore Your Shadow**

**Your Shadow Will Undermine the Best of Who You Are**

**Your Shadow Will Limit Your Ability to Serve Others**

“The degree to which you recognize and engage your own shadow is the degree to which you can free others to face theirs.”

## **Your Shadow Will Blind You to the Shadow of Others**

### **The Gifts of Choosing to Face Your Shadow**

#### **You Break the Shadow’s Hidden Power**

“One of the great truths of life is this: You cannot change what you are unaware of.”

#### **You Discover the Shadow’s Hidden Treasures**

“Lincoln’s suffering and weaknesses...later fueled his greatness and propelled his personal transformation...Whatever Lincoln’s shadow, it is clear that his willingness to acknowledge and integrate all of himself is what enabled him to serve and lead a nation in great danger of falling apart. He did not need to demonize the opposition by dividing the nation into heroes and villains. He had learned to hold that tension and complexity within himself.”

### **Four Pathways for Facing Your Shadow**

“In the marketplace, businesses have come to rely on the field of emotional intelligence to help leaders manage their emotions and minimize the negative impact they might have on their teams and organizations. Our concern here, however, is with more than just managing and minimizing negative impact. What we are after is long-term inner transformation into the image of Christ for the sake of the world.”

#### **1. Tame Your Feelings by Naming Your Feelings**

“Our brains are rewired when we learn to name our feelings. Even at the cellular level, something powerful is tamed and changed within us when we recognize and identify our emotions. You can begin to name your feelings by writing in a journal as part of your time with God. You might prayerfully consider and respond to questions such as these: What am I feeling? And what am I feeling about that feeling? What am I sad about? Glad about? Angry about? Anxious about? Where in my body am I feeling tension or stress (e.g., shoulders, neck, stomach)? What might this be telling me about what is going on inside me?”

“After identifying my feelings, I made it a habit to reflect on why I might be experiencing each emotion. For example, “Why might I be angry when I think about meeting that person from our church? Is it her apparent forcefulness? Is it that I am afraid I will give in to pressure and make an unwise decision I will later regret?” Again, I wrote my responses in a journal. Once I could name my feelings and identify their source, I could then take appropriate action, such as, graciously saying no to an invitation, asking difficult questions, or waiting before making a final decision.”

“I wrote in a journal almost every day as part of my prayer time. This proved to be a foundational discipline for me because it allowed me to exercise my long dormant “feeling” muscles. Three to four times a week, I paused to reflect on the emotions I had experienced the previous day. Those

“feeling” workouts strengthened my routine awareness of my emotions. Soon I got better at identifying my feelings in the moment so I didn’t have to wait until the next day to acknowledge them. I also experienced a greater freedom and peace because I was no longer suppressing them. While initially it was difficult, with consistent practice, identifying and naming my emotions became as natural as breathing. After identifying my feelings, I made it a habit to reflect on why I might be experiencing each emotion. For example, “Why might I be angry when I think about meeting that person from our church? Is it her apparent forcefulness? Is it that I am afraid I will give in to pressure and make an unwise decision I will later regret?” Again, I wrote my responses in a journal. Once I could name my feelings and identify their source, I could then take appropriate action, such as, graciously saying no to an invitation, asking difficult questions, or waiting before making a final decision.”

## **2. Use a Genogram to Explore the Impact of Your Past**

## **3. Identify the Negative Scripts Handed Down to You**

“A negative script is an internalized message from the past that shapes our conscious and unconscious behaviors in the present. Even if we have put these scripts out of our minds, our bodies remember them.”

## **4. Seek Feedback from Trustworthy Sources**

## **Staying with Jesus as You Face Your Shadow**

“Each time you pass through a season of facing your shadow, you will be transformed even more into the image of Jesus.”

# **Chapter 3: Lead Out of Your Marriage or Singleness**

## **Leading Out of Your Marriage**

### **Marriage Is Your First Ambition**

“The first ambition for married Christian leaders must shift from leading our church, organization, or team to loving our spouse passionately. We must cultivate a strong desire to make visible the invisible — the love of Jesus for his church — in and through the love we have for our spouse. We then lead out of the overflow of this love. In other words, out of the giving and receiving of love in our relationship, we have extra “give away” love. It overflows from the nurturing, connection, and sense of well-being we receive from one another.”

### **Marriage Is Your First Passion**

“There are three things that enable Geri and me to make our marriage, rather than ministry, our first passion:

- We pray for greater passion.
- We make cultivating passion an intentional spiritual practice.
- We intentionally affirm one another.”

### **Marriage Is Your Loudest Gospel Message**

“A Christian marriage points beyond itself to something more important — to Christ.”

### **Leading Out of Your Singleness**

#### **Be Intentional about the Kind of Single God Has Called You to Be**

- Vowed Celibates
- Dedicated Celibates

#### **A Healthy Singleness Is Your First Ambition**

- "Devote yourself to excellent self-care.”
- “Invest in community, cultivating at least one or two companions for the journey.”
- “Practice hospitality regularly.”

## **Chapter 4: Slow Down For Loving Union**

### **The Danger of Leading without Jesus**

“Somehow, it has become part of our default thinking that external markers of success are an indication that all must certainly be well at the leadership level.”

“I was in my early years as a Christian when I first came to grips with the sad truth that God appeared to use prominent Christian leaders whose relationship with Jesus was either nonexistent or seriously underdeveloped. It was a discovery that left me confused and disoriented. Yet, after decades in ministry, I am no longer so confused. Why? Because I have experienced to some degree what it’s like to be one of those leaders. I have prepared and preached sermons without thinking about or spending time with Jesus. I know the experience of doing good things that helped a lot of people while being too busy or caught up in my own whirlwind of leadership worries to be intimately connected to Jesus.”

“Theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758) wrote about how often Scripture describes people who do things for God without having a life with God. Characters such as Balaam the Old Testament prophet, Judas Iscariot, and Saul were all engaged in what most certainly would have been considered effective work for God by their communities, but without having an authentic connection to him. The only mark



of genuine spiritual maturity and ministry effectiveness, Edwards concluded, is the outworking of agape — a self-giving love for God and others. That is the one quality of our lives and leadership the devil can never counterfeit. And the source of that agape love can be found only in a life of loving union with God.”

## **What Is Loving Union?**

“To lovingly allow God to have full access to your life.”

“In loving union, we keep that door wide open. We allow the will of God to have full access to every area of our lives, including every aspect of our leadership — from difficult conversations and decision-making to managing our emotional triggers. Cultivating this kind of relationship with God can’t be hurried or rushed. We must slow down and build into our lives a structure and rhythm that make this kind of loving surrender routinely possible. The question we must wrestle with is this: In what ways does my current pace of life and leadership enhance or diminish my ability to allow God’s will and presence full scope in my life?”

“Jesus faced overwhelming pressures in his life — pressures that far outstrip anything most of us will ever face. Yet he routinely stepped away from those endless leadership demands to spend significant time with the Father. He slowed down to ensure he was in sync with God — that he was in the Father and the Father was in him, powerfully filling every crevice of his body, mind, and spirit. In routinely stepping away from his active work, he entrusted the outcome of his circumstances, problems, and ministry to the Father. And as a result, every action Jesus took was rooted in a place of deep rest and centeredness out of his relationship with God.<sup>4</sup> Just as Jesus lived in relaxed, loving union with the Father, he invites us to share in that relationship with him: “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The Greek verb translated as remain can also be translated as abide, to continue with, to stick with, to make one’s home with. It captures the nonnegotiable requirement of what it means to follow Jesus in loving union. He promises that if we do this, “fruit” will always follow.”

## **You Know You’re Not Experiencing Loving Union When You . . .**

- Can’t shake the pressure you feel from having too much to do in too little time.
- Are always rushing.
- Routinely fire off quick opinions and judgments.
- Are often fearful about the future.
- Are overly concerned with what others think.
- Are defensive and easily offended.
- Are routinely preoccupied and distracted.
- Consistently ignore the stress, anxiety, and tightness of your body.

- Feel unenthusiastic or threatened by the success of others.
- Routinely spend more time talking than listening.

## **The Consequences of Not Slowing Down**

### **You Can't Do God's Work Your Way without Paying a Steep Price**

“Moses and Aaron pay a stiff price. God names their underlying offense rebellion and unbelief and prohibits them from leading the people into the Promised Land.”

“When was the last time you took matters into your own hands and “struck the rock” in your leadership? What “promised land” might you be sacrificing right now? Whatever the particulars of your situation, I can promise that one of the first things to go will be Jesus’ joy and peace. Leadership will become hard. The people you serve will feel like a burden, and you will find yourself wishing you could be somewhere else.”

### **You Can't Live at Warp Speed without Warping Your Soul**

“Whenever we find ourselves wanting the ministry impact of Jesus while simultaneously resisting spending time with Jesus, we are positioning ourselves for a beating and some variation on being run “out of the house naked and bleeding.” The seven sons of Sceva tried to speak and act on truths that were not rooted in their lives. They did not have sufficient strength in their life with God to support the level of spiritual warfare in which they were engaged.”

### **You Can't Skim without Paying a Long-Term Price**

“This will enable him to redefine success as being faithful to what God has given him to do in his church and to resist the internal pressure he feels that is causing so much dis-ease and anxiety.”

“In asking you to make the necessary changes to slow down for loving union with God, I am not asking you to add one more item to your already over-burdened schedule. I am asking you to make a U-turn and rearrange your life around an entirely new way of being a leader. In fact, what I am asking you to do is nothing short of a groundbreaking, culture-defying act of rebellion against the contemporary Western way of doing leadership.”

## **Take Your First Steps to Slow Down for Loving Union**

### **Find Your “Desert” with God**

“Throughout Scripture and the history of the church, the desert has been a place of spiritual preparation, purification, and transformation. Moses spent forty years in the desert before God called him to lead his people out of Egypt. The prophet Elijah lived in the desert and, as a result, stood firm as God’s prophet in one of the lowest moments of Israel’s history. John the Baptist spent much of his adult life in the desert. Out of that place in God, he called a nation to repentance and discerned Jesus as the Messiah. Paul spent three years in the Arabian Desert receiving God’s revelation before going to Jerusalem to begin his apostolic ministry. Jesus intentionally moved back and forth from active

ministry with people to a desert place of being alone with the Father. In order to slow down for loving union, we need to develop a similar rhythm of finding our “desert” with God.”

“Each of us needs to identify and protect a desert space with God even if we live in a congested urban environment. In the desert — that solitary, undistracted place — we position ourselves to open the door of our hearts as best we can so that Jesus’ presence and his will have full access to every area of our life. We slow down to make this kind of loving surrender possible.”

### **Establish a Rule of Life**

“The best way to begin crafting a Rule of Life is to first do some prep work. Before filling out a sheet with commitments for prayer, rest, relationships, and work, take some time to work through the following questions:

- **What do you currently do that nurtures your spirit and fills you with delight?** Consider people and places as well as activities. Write down everything you can think of. Your list may include gardening, walking the dog, being in nature, talking with close friends, cooking, painting, jumping out of airplanes, or any number of other possibilities. List them all. If you don’t currently do much that nurtures your spirit, spend some time identifying some things you’d like to try.
- **What people, places, and activities do you need to avoid because they deplete you or make it difficult for you to remain anchored in Christ?** This includes anything that negatively impacts your spirit — violent movies, hurrying, going beyond your limits, etc. Again, write down everything that comes to mind.
- **What “have to’s” impact your rhythms in this season of life?** For example, this might include caring for aging parents, raising a young child or a child with special needs, dealing with health concerns, or navigating a demanding season at work, etc.”

“As you consider each category, listen first to your heart’s desires. What is it you want most in this area of your life? God often speaks to us through our desires, so don’t overlook them or diminish their importance. Make sure your rule includes some joy, play, and fun. Take baby steps. Don’t make your rule impossible to follow.

When you consider the prayer and rest categories, I encourage you to begin by choosing one or two of what I consider to be the top five practices that enable us to be more intentional about slowing down for loving union: silence, Scripture meditation, the Daily Office, the prayer of Examen, and Sabbath-keeping.”

## **Chapter 5: Practice Sabbath Delight**

“It was the penetrating truth of this statement that stunned me: If they stop, they’ll die. They’re terrified. “The terror of stopping reveals the depth of their emptiness,” Bob continued matter-of-factly. “Pete, you’re

inviting them into practices that might well obliterate their entire sense of self — the self that's rooted in their work performance.”

## What Is the Sabbath?

"Biblical Sabbath is a twenty-four-hour block of time in which we stop work, enjoy rest, practice delight, and contemplate God. The traditional Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown Saturday. In most Christian traditions, Sabbath has been observed on Sunday. The apostle Paul considered one day for Sabbath as good as another (Romans 14:1 – 17). So the particular day of the week doesn't matter. What matters is to set aside a twenty-four-hour period and protect it.”

**“Stop.** Sabbath is first and foremost a day when we cease all work — paid and unpaid. On the Sabbath we embrace our limits. We let go of the illusion that we are indispensable to the running of the world. We recognize we will never finish all our goals and projects, and that God is on the throne, managing quite well in ruling the universe without our help.”

**“Rest.** Once we stop, we accept God's invitation to rest. God rested after his work of creation. Every seventh day, we are to do the same (Genesis 2:1 – 4). We engage in activities that restore and replenish us — from napping, hiking, reading, and eating good food to enjoying hobbies and playing sports. The key is to rest from both paid and unpaid work. Resting from unpaid work, however, requires advance planning. If I am to have any hope of enjoying a Sabbath rest, I need to set aside time during the week to attend to the routine tasks of life I won't do on Sabbath — paying bills, cleaning or fixing something around the house, doing laundry, and balancing the checkbook, etc.”

**“Delight.** As part of preparing to practice the Sabbath, one of the most important questions to consider is, “What gives me joy and delight?” This will differ for each of us, but part of the Sabbath invitation is to enjoy and delight in creation and her gifts.”

**“Contemplate.** Pondering the love of God is the central focus of our Sabbaths.”

“When I experience a sense of God's pleasure and approval on Sabbath, I know it has nothing to do with my work-related accomplishments. This in itself is a gift that has helped me to separate my relationship with God (my being with God) from my work as a leader (my doing for God).”

“On Sabbath, we practice eternity in time. We look forward to that day at the end of our earthly lives when we will perfectly stop, rest, delight, and contemplate the glory of God. For a brief moment in time, we reorient ourselves away from this world in all its brokenness and anticipate the world to come — how things on earth are meant to be. In a very real sense, the practice of Sabbath joins heaven and earth, equipping us not merely to rest from our work but also to work from our rest.”

## Why Sabbath Is Such a Challenge Today

### We Are Afraid of What We Might Find Inside Us

“It's important to distinguish shame from guilt. Guilt is about something I do. For example, “I ran a red light.” It is one mistake I made, not a reflection of my entire person. Shame, on the other hand, is about who I am. “I didn't just make a mistake when I ran that red light, I am a mistake.” When we fall short as

a leader, we think things like, I'm such an idiot. I'm awful and worthless! I'm such a fraud — this wouldn't have happened if I were a decent leader. Shame testifies not to wrong doing but to flawed being.”

“Consider how many of these qualities might be true of you:

- Do you get more excited about your work than about family or anything else?
- Do you take work with you to bed? On weekends? On vacation?
- Is work the activity you like to do best and talk about most?
- Do you work more than forty hours a week?
- Have your family or friends given up expecting you on time?
- Do you take on extra work because you are concerned that it won't otherwise get done?
- Do you underestimate how long a project will take and then rush to complete it?
- Do you get impatient with people who have other priorities besides work?
- Have your long hours hurt your family or other relationships?”

### **We Associate Sabbath with Legalism or a Dead Past**

### **We Have a Distorted View of Our Core Identity**

## **The Sabbath Is a Beautiful Diamond**

### **Sabbath as a Core Spiritual Formation Discipline**

“Almost every spiritual discipline has value, but some practices constitute the core of maturing in Christ. These practices don't save us, but they are indispensable for growth. Think of it this way. We are not saved by reading the Bible. We are not saved by prayer. We are not saved by worship. We are saved by trusting in Jesus Christ alone, who died for our sins and rose from the dead. But if we are not routinely reading Scripture, praying, or encountering God in worship, it is unlikely we are growing much spiritually. Keeping the Sabbath is a core spiritual discipline — an essential delivery mechanism for God's grace and goodness in our lives. It provides a God-ordained way to slow us down for meaningful connection with God, ourselves, and those we care about.”

### **Sabbath as Resistance to Principalities and Powers**

### **Sabbath as Play**

“Play is important because it is an indicator that we really do believe life is more than work. It balances our tendency to be too serious and too focused on results. When we are playing, we accomplish no pragmatic purpose.”

## **Sabbath as a Place of Revelation**

“On Sabbath, something of God’s holiness and goodness is revealed, not simply in the way he works but in the way he rests. This means that when we fail to receive God’s gift of Sabbath, we miss out on something of God — something we can’t get any other way.”

“God commanded the ancient Israelites to let the land remain fallow for a full year every seventh year, calling it a sabbatical rest for the land. Why? So he could replenish depleted nutrients in the soil. To work the soil year after year without this rest would have left the soil infertile. The soil of our souls is not all that different. Work requires something of us; it depletes our energies, our wisdom, our reserves. If we don’t allow the soil of our souls to rest, we do violence to ourselves. As human beings, we were created for a balanced rhythm of work and rest. Over time, fatigue and exertion make it more difficult for us to live and lead from the fruits of the Spirit. But on the Sabbath, God uses rest, delight, and play to replenish depleted spiritual nutrients such as love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness. We receive his love and he replenishes us — as persons and as leaders — so we can bear fruit.”

## **What Does It Mean to Lead Out of Your Sabbath?**

“As someone who has been in leadership for nearly three decades, I can tell you that Sabbath is without a doubt the most important day of the week for my leadership. It is also the one day of the week I most believe — and live out — a fundamental truth of the gospel. How? *I do nothing productive, and yet I am utterly loved.*”

## **What Will You Do with Sabbath?**

“If you do not keep the Sabbath, God will keep it for you...today. If we do not keep the Sabbath, we are incurring a deficit and God himself will stop us, through a crisis, a health issue, an emergency, or anything that gets our attention.”

“God often does stop us when we repeatedly violate our limits and disregard our need for rest. If you refuse the gift of Sabbath, sooner or later, one way or another, you will find yourself flat on your back — emotionally, physically, and/or spiritually.”

## **Part 2: The Outer Life**

“When we start with outer life practices without addressing our inner lives, the positive changes we make are unsustainable.”

“A tree with a shallow root system may still look beautiful on the outside, but it is incapable of supplying the water and nutrients for long-term upward growth of an entire tree. This becomes a significant problem when our ministries and organizations grow larger and faster than the depth of our roots can sustain. Deep and wide roots anchor a tree, allowing it to draw up plentiful water and nutrients from a larger and deeper area of soil. In many cases, the root systems of our spiritual lives are inadequate for the challenges of shaping and leading a growing church, organization, or team (part 1).

At the same time, it seems logical that a deeper inner life should lead to good organizational practices. Sadly, however, it often does not. There is a disconnect when we fail to apply our spirituality with Jesus to such leadership tasks as planning, team building, boundaries, endings, and new beginnings. Too often, we rely instead on unmodified business practices to navigate these tasks, grafting secular branches onto our spiritual root system. This tends to bear the wrong kind of fruit.”

## **Chapter 6: Planning and Decision Making**

"For years I believed that if I could simply identify the right planning and decision-making process, we would then make good decisions. That, it turned out, was both naïve and misguided. It wasn't until we developed our root system (i.e., our inner lives described in chapters 2 – 5) that we began to make progress in overcoming our poor planning and decision making. Our life with Jesus began to flow upward and outward in new and powerful ways. The dramatic difference from our old standard to our new emotionally healthy planning and decision making was suddenly crystal clear.”

### **Characteristics of Standard Planning and Decision Making**

#### **We Define Success Too Narrowly**

“The problem was that the portion of our time and energy devoted to thinking about external issues far exceeded the amount of time and energy we devoted to internal measures of transformation, such as the depth of people’s personal relationship with God, the quality of marriages and singleness, the level of emotional maturity, and the integrity of our relationships as a community. At the leadership level, we also minimized the importance of beneath-the-surface transformation in our own lives as the source of power from which we would reach the world.”

#### **We Make Plans and Take Action without God**

“It is biblical and wonderful to make plans to expand God’s kingdom. The questions we must continually ask, however, are these: Where does this opportunity or plan fit within the larger plan of what God is doing in the world? How do we sense God is inviting us to do this work? Our perspective is limited. His thoughts and ways are far higher and different than ours (Isaiah 55:8 – 9). The only way we can know his plans is to listen carefully to his voice.”

#### **We Go Beyond God’s Limits**

“As human beings, we are creatures who must routinely face up to any host of limits, some mild and some extreme. It was with this in mind that theologian Reinhold Niebuhr described the very nature of sin as “the desire to overcome our limitations and finitude because of anxiety about our creaturely existence.” And Christian leaders today continue to do this — all the time. For some reason, we find it impossibly difficult to wait, listen, and honor our limits. It is perhaps one of the greatest and yet most subtle ways we rebel against God.”

“It takes maturity to decline a great opportunity for growth and to embrace a modest plan. If we are one hundred people, why not become two hundred? If we are three hundred, why not become five

hundred? It is easy to have fantasies for ourselves that our real lives cannot support. But attempting to do more than God intends is a formula for both failure and burnout.”

## **Characteristics of Emotionally Healthy Planning and Decision Making**

“Emotionally healthy planning and decision making begins with an assumption...as fallen human beings, we have a tendency to develop hardened hearts. In the twelfth century, Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux wrote this warning to one of his monk-disciples, Eugene III, who had recently been made the pope: I am afraid that you will despair of an end to the many demands that are made upon you and become calloused . . . It would be much wiser to remove yourself from these demands even for a while than to allow yourself to be distracted by them and led, little by little, where you certainly do not want to go. Where? To a hard heart. Do not go on to ask what that is; if you have not been terrified by it, it is yours already.”

### **We define success as radically doing God’s will.**

“Have you ever considered that your ministry, organization, or team may be growing and yet actually failing? Before answering that question, think with me for a moment about some of God’s faithful and, hence, most successful leaders. Jesus said of John the Baptist, “Among those born of women there is no one greater than John” (Luke 7:28). Yet, if we were to create a bar chart on the size of John’s ministry over time, it would demonstrate a peak followed by a steady and precipitous decline (not to mention a dead stop after his beheading). The prophet Jeremiah served God with passion and obedience, but was mostly written off or ridiculed by an unresponsive remnant — definitely not what anyone considered success. For the prophet Amos, success was leaving his more spiritually fruitful home in the southern kingdom of Judah in order to preach to the northern kingdom of Israel whose people never responded to his message. Jesus left a revival in Capernaum where large numbers of people were responding in order to start all over again in other cities (Mark 1:39 – 40).”

“God’s standard of success isn’t limited to growth. Success is first and foremost doing what God has asked us to do, doing it his way, and in his timing.”

### **Success is when people are transformed deep beneath the surface of their lives.**

“We recognize our limits in measuring a person’s transformation in Christ. We are dealing with people, not widgets.”

### **Success is bridging racial, cultural, economic, and gender barriers.**

### **Success is serving our community and the world.**

### **We create a space for heart preparation.**

“In emotionally healthy planning and decision making, we don’t simply open meetings with prayer and then leap headlong into our agenda. We begin by creating a space for heart preparation.”

### **Personal Heart Preparation**



“Before entering a meeting room, our first priority as leaders is to prepare our heart with God. How much time is needed for this? That depends on the level of the decision or plans being made and how much internal noise might be cluttering your inner life at the moment. The simple principle we follow at New Life is: the weightier the decision, the more time is required for preparation. Jesus models this kind of heart preparation for us. Before choosing the Twelve, he stayed up all night:

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.*

LUKE 6:12 – 13, EMPHASIS ADDED

In order to discern the Father’s priorities in the midst of voices clamoring for him to stay in Capernaum, Jesus rose early in the morning for solitude:

*At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”*

LUKE 4:42 – 43, EMPHASIS ADDED

Jesus consistently engaged and then withdrew from people and the demands of ministry in order to pray alone:

*Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. **But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.***

LUKE 5:15, EMPHASIS ADDED

Perhaps most instructive of all is Jesus’ struggle to surrender to the will of his Father in Gethsemane. This is one of the most significant planning and decision-making texts in all of Scripture. Three times, Jesus prays the same thing:

*“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

MATTHEW 26:39

Jesus, the leader, did not fall mindlessly into obedience. He learned it — and so must we:

*During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.*

HEBREWS 5:7 – 8

All true obedience is a learned, struggled-for, and prayed-for obedience. If it took falling with his face to the ground and great struggle for the Son of God to submit himself to the will of the Father, how can we expect that it will require any less of us?

My goal in preparing my heart for planning and decision making is to remain in a state Ignatius of Loyola referred to as indifference. By indifference, he does not mean apathy or disinterest. He simply means we must become indifferent to anything but the will of God. Ignatius taught that the degree to which we are open to any outcome or answer from God is the degree to which we are ready to really hear what God has to say. If we are clutching or overly attached to one outcome versus another, we won't hear God clearly. Our spiritual ears will be deafened by the racket of our disordered loves, fears, and attachments. In such a state, it is almost a forgone conclusion that we will confuse our will with God's will."

"Like so many leaders, when I spend a day going from one meeting straight into another, I can easily find myself dragging the issues and problems from one meeting into the next. In order to be fully present for the next meeting, I need to bring closure to the one before. If I fail to do this, I won't be able to hear God's leading above my own internal noise. And so I practice *statio*. I take a few minutes alone for silence between meetings. Knowing that God can speak to me through my body, I begin by paying attention to whether or not my body feels tense or anxious."

### **Team Heart Preparation**

"In order to make good decisions, we begin our meetings — whether it is a weekly team meeting or a full-day planning meeting — by creating the necessary space for the team to center their hearts before God."

### **We pray for prudence.**

"Prudence has been called the "executive virtue," meaning it enables us to think clearly and not be swept up by our impulses or emotions. Prudence remembers past experiences, our own and others, and draws out any applicable lessons and principles. It partners with humility and willingly seeks counsel from others with more experience. Prudence is cautious and careful to provide for the future. Prudence asks, "Feelings aside, what is best in the long run?"<sup>13</sup> It carefully considers all relevant factors, possibilities, difficulties, and outcomes. Perhaps most important is that prudence refuses to rush — it is willing to wait on God for as long as it takes and to give the decision-making process the time it needs."

### **We look for God in our limits.**

"I finally went to my doctor and asked what was wrong. He swiftly diagnosed the problem: "Pete, you're exhausted. Your body wants to rest. Go home and sleep." What happened? I violated God's gift of limits, ignoring the many signals my body had been giving me all along that I was off my center in God. I rebelled against God right in the midst of my work for God. And I had even written a book about how not to do this very thing!"

"Limits are often simply God's gifts in disguise. This makes them one of the most counterintuitive, difficult truths in Scripture to embrace. It flies in the face of our natural tendency to want to play god and run the world."

**My time limits are a gift.**

**Our location limits are a gift.**

## Ask the Four Questions

- **“Face your shadow.** How might my shadow, or that of others on my team, be impacting my decisions and plans? What are my greatest fears? In light of the decisions before me, am I setting aside enough time for personal heart preparation to minimize any influence my shadow might have on my decisions and plans? How much heart preparation time do the members of my team need? What wise counsel do I need to minimize my shadow's influence on my decisions?
- **Lead out of your marriage or singleness.** How will this decision or plan impact my ability to lead out of my marriage or singleness? What changes might we need to make as a team in order to take into account our need for healthy, vibrant marriages or singleness? Are we embracing the God-given limits of our particular marriage and single situations?
- **Slow down for loving union.** How might this decision or plan impact my ability to remain in loving union with Jesus? On a scale of one to ten, what is the level of anxiety of our team as we consider this decision? Have we prayed for prudence and gathered all the important facts? Have I (we) done the slow, diligent work needed to listen for God's whisperings about his definition of success for us? What temptations do I/we need to be careful to avoid?
- **Practice Sabbath delight.** How will this decision affect our work-Sabbath rhythms? Have we thought through the details of how these plans will affect the rest of our work so that it does not spill over into our Sabbath delight? Am I, and is our team, making these plans and decision from a place of rest? What difference will this decision make ten, fifty, or a hundred years from now? What difference will this decision make after we have entered our eternal Sabbath and see Jesus face-to-face?"

## Chapter 7: Culture and Team Building

### What is culture and team building?

"Team building is fairly easy to define; it involves mobilizing a group of people with diverse skills who are committed to a shared vision and common goals. Culture, however, is somewhat more challenging to describe. Why? Because it consists primarily of unspoken rules about 'the way we do things around here.' Culture is that imprecise something, the invisible presence or personality of a place that can be difficult to describe without actually experiencing it. It is often more readily felt than articulated. Perhaps the simplest and best definitions I've come across describe culture as 'the sum-total of the

learned patterns of thought and behavior' of any given group; and 'culture is what human beings make of the world.'”

## Characteristics of Emotionally Healthy Culture and Team Building

### Work Performance and Personal Spiritual Formation Are Inseparable

“The health and growth of a person’s inner life is inseparable from work performance.”

“Minimally transformed leaders will always result in minimally transformed teams doing minimally transforming ministry. This is true even if the numbers are up and the program is excellent. How could we expect it to be any other way? How can we expect to change the world for Christ if we ourselves are not being changed by him? In order to have any hope of dealing with immature or problematic team members, we have to focus first on our own spiritual transformation.”

### Personal Spiritual Development

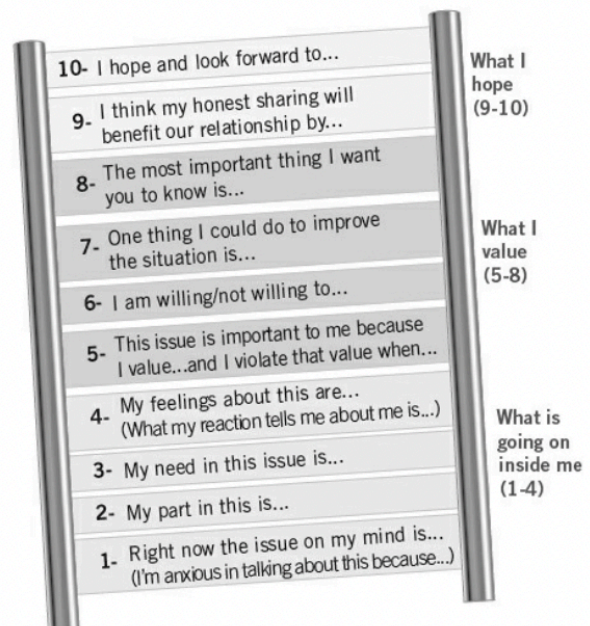
“I always recommend that the first category listed for every leadership job description read, ‘Personal Spiritual Formation Development.’”

“We lead out of who we are. Thus, disciplining ourselves to invest time, energy, and money in personal development is not a selfish indulgence, but one of the most loving things we offer to those we serve.”

### Team Member Spiritual Development

#### CLIMB THE LADDER OF INTEGRITY

“The purpose of the Ladder of Integrity is to help people discover what is going on inside them — to discern their values and assert themselves — in a respectful, non-blaming way. We call it The Ladder of Integrity because it provides a systematic approach that helps people to be honest and transparent as they prepare themselves to address problems and conflicts with another person.”



**Be sure to stick to one issue.**

## **The Elephants in the Room Are Acknowledged and Confronted**

“An “elephant in the room” refers to an obviously inappropriate or immature behavior that remains unacknowledged and/or unaddressed. Such elephants commonly roam wild and free among many teams.

“Overlooking unacceptable behavior in situations like these is so common in teams that when I suggest part of leadership is to expose and explore these elephants, leaders often look at me in disbelief: ‘Pete, you’ve got to be kidding. Do you know what would happen if I started confronting every elephant in the room? I might lose half my team. And I wouldn’t have time for anything else!’”

“Elephants in the room rarely disappear by themselves. In fact, they often feed off the silence and grow into bigger, crisis-laden elephants over time. I know because I’ve ignored so many myself — and paid a steep price as a result.”

“The higher up we go in leadership, the greater the level of maturity is required. As people step into progressively wider spheres of influence and greater responsibility, unresolved issues in their inner lives will inevitably be exposed.”

“Out of our commitment to rid New Life of unwanted elephants and create a new culture, Geri and I developed practical skills for our leadership and church over a sixteen-year period. The formula was simple: New skills + new language + intentional follow-up = transformed community.”

“We call these eight tools “emotionally healthy skills.” While they may look deceptively simple, each is built on a rich theological foundation and contains multiple levels of depth to understand and live out. They are:

1. The Community Temperature Reading
2. Stop Mind Reading
3. Clarify Expectations
4. Genogram Your Family
5. Explore the Iceberg
6. Incarnational Listening
7. Climb the Ladder of Integrity
8. Clean Fighting”

“Putting these skills into practice has given all of us a common framework for confronting the elephants in the room and wrestling with the difficult issues they represent. Using these skills also helped us to develop a new vocabulary. For example, when we are tempted to make a premature judgment, we might catch ourselves and instead model a more mature and loving conversation. Two simple but key concepts we have integrated into our New Life culture are puzzles and what we call complaints with recommendations. The latter involves using the phrase I notice . . . and I prefer when making a complaint.”

“Being puzzled enables us to avoid assumptions and negative interpretations. For example, instead of saying, “Why did you leave such a mess in the office kitchen?” we can say, “I’m puzzled about why you didn’t clean up after yourself.” Instead of saying, “You should have returned my e-mail sooner,” we say, “I’m puzzled about why you didn’t respond to my e-mail sooner.” Making “I’m puzzled” statements forces us to acknowledge that we don’t know why. It helps us to pause and catch our heart before it jumps to judgment.

We also teach our team and members of the church how to make a healthy complaint in our culture as the new family of Jesus. To unlearn negative generational patterns from their family of origin, we encourage people to use the phrase I notice . . . and I prefer as the formula for making a complaint. For example, when a supervisor sends a PowerPoint presentation to the tech volunteer at the last minute, instead of stuffing frustration and annoyance, he might say, “I notice that you sent me your PowerPoint two hours before your presentation, and I would prefer if you could send it one day ahead of time so I have time to upload it into our computer system.” Instead of saying, “You were late for our meeting. If you don’t show up on time, I can’t work with you in the future,” we might say, “I notice you arrived twenty minutes late for our leadership team meeting, and I prefer that you call when you are running late so I can adjust my schedule.”

It’s a simple phrase, but saying I notice . . . and I prefer effectively gives people training wheels to relate differently. It helps them to be aware of and take responsibility for the small irritations and annoyances that arise every day.”

“Great wisdom is found in the ancient axiom “All roads lead to Rome.” Just as spokes on a wheel lead to the hub, the Roman Empire’s excellent road system led travelers directly back to Rome. In the same way, all surface issues in our lives will eventually lead back to the same unhealthy issues ingrained in the way we relate to ourselves and others. When we work with someone to fully unpack one — like the small incident between Andy and the music director — we can expect it to lead to the deep roots that inform other similar behaviors. Address this one thoroughly and light will be shed on the rest as well.

If we lead within the church or nonprofit sector, we may not be able to pay marketplace salaries. In fact, most of the teams we lead might well be comprised of volunteers. But we can offer something much more valuable — personal spiritual development to help those we lead become more like Jesus. That is quite a gift.”

### **Time and Energy Are Invested in the Team’s Personal Spiritual Development**

“Emotionally healthy leaders dedicate themselves to their team’s personal development, and not just their professional or ministry skills. They know this will bear rich fruit and ripple through the

ministry in powerful ways...as Christian leaders we must shift a portion of our energy away from programs or the larger ministry to the intentional development of our core team."

"Something was seriously out of order in his understanding of what it meant to be on staff at New Life and to represent us — regardless of his gifting. Mike wasn't going to make it long term at New Life unless a supervisor focused on his personal development. The question was how to create safety for him in this crisis so that he could be mentored and developed. How could we help and not hurt him? To not address this would clearly be a serious failure on our part. We would be promising him a long-term future on our staff, a promise we could not keep if his behavior continued unchecked. Before the meeting with Mike, I thought, This young man is so talented. We are going to give him a painful gift that I pray he receives. But we need to offer it to him since few other workplaces will do this for him in the future. My recommendation was that we call Mike into the room to let him know that his behavior was unacceptable. We communicated the following: 'Mike, if someone who is your superior asks you to do something on a day you are working, you do it. If you do something like this again to any person in authority at New Life, you will be fired. In another workplace, you would already have been fired.'"

"Teachable moments often come to us when we least expect them. In addition, they often painfully intersect with our own lives and internal issues. But these transformational times are so powerful — for both our teams and our culture — that they are worth the time and energy it takes to steward them well."

### **The Quality of People's Marriages and Singleness Is Foundational**

"If we really believe that Christian marriage and singleness are meant to be living signs and wonders of God's love for the world, and that this aspect of our lives is the loudest gospel message we preach, we need to engage those we lead about this area of their marriage or singleness."

"You are to love your wife and then your work — in that order."

"The apostle Paul knew it was impossible for leaders to create a healthy church if their own home life was not in order (1 Timothy 3:8)."

"I ask our single leaders whether they are protecting time to be in close community with a few people with whom they do life with the same intentionality and seriousness that I ask a married person, 'Are you protecting time with your spouse?' I take an interest in their hobbies, delights, and interests outside work in the same way that I take an interest in the activities of a married person. I protect their Sabbath and work rhythms with the same intensity that I protect the Sabbath and work rhythms of those with families."

### **Ask the Four Questions**

**"Face Your Shadow.** How am I growing in my awareness of my shadow so that it does not adversely affect the culture I am seeking to build with my team? When a recent situation with my team triggered an old automatic response, what might have calmed me down to respond in a more mature, thoughtful way? Who are the people with whom I am in relationship who can serve as mirrors for these blind spots and vulnerabilities?"

**“Lead Out of Your Marriage or Singleness.** How well am I taking into account and nurturing my marriage or singleness as a model for building a healthy team and culture? What, specifically, am I doing to set a boundary between the demands of developing a healthy culture and my marriage/singleness? If married: What would my spouse say is the greatest challenge to our marriage? If single: What would my closest friends say is the greatest challenge to my singleness? What would I say?”

**“Slow Down for Loving Union.** To what degree does my “being with Jesus” sustain my “doing for Jesus” in this challenging work of culture and team building? A little, a lot, not at all? What are the spiritual practices most helpful to me right now to help me slow down? What resources am I drawing from to grow in my personal relationship with Jesus that I can also bring to my team? What adjustments might God be inviting me to make so I can slow down, and help my team slow down, for loving union with him?”

**“Practice Sabbath Delight.** How am I practicing my work-Sabbath rhythm in ways that model what we are seeking to build with other people? What do I find most replenishing and delightful during Sabbath, and how can that add value to our team? What is the greatest challenge I have to overcome to enter true Sabbath delight, and how is that similar to struggles others on my team experience? How can I build more play into my life to balance my work, and how can I help each member of my team to do the same?”

## Chapter 8: Power and Wise Boundaries

### What Is “Christian” Power?

“So few leaders have an awareness of, let alone reflect on, the nature of their God-given power. As a result, some carelessly wield their power with aggression, exploiting it to their own advantage.”

“On the opposite extreme are the leaders who shrink back from exercising their power. Their reluctance to assert themselves leaves the door open to the wrong people stepping into the power vacuum — which causes all sorts of chaos. It is not uncommon for these ministries or churches with weak leaders to fit the following description of God’s people from the book of Judges: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit (Judges 21:25).”

“In my years of teaching and mentoring leaders, I’ve seen just as much damage result from this second group, the leaders who are ambivalent and uncomfortable with their power. Perhaps it’s because I identify with them. For these leaders, it somehow feels wrong and unbiblical to grab the reins and take charge because power implies privilege, a higher social status, being above others. The thought of having power as a leader sounds detached and cold. So they prefer to deny or minimize the very real power they have. Some may even feel unworthy or afraid to exercise power, especially in God’s name. As a result, they live in a fog, feeling powerless internally, yet responsible to exercise power to lead others.”

“We *all* have power”.



- Positional power.
- Personal power.
- “God factor” power.
- Projected power.
- Relational power.
- Cultural power.

## **Characteristics of Emotionally Healthy Power and Wise Boundaries**

“A good test of a person’s character is how they deal with adversity. But the best test of a leader’s character is how they deal with power. If we want to use our power well as Christ-followers, there are three things we must do:”

### **Identify and inventory our power**

“by “inventory,” I mean we not only think about our power, we ponder it and own it.”

### **Carefully steward our power so it comes under others**

"What would you say is the greatest temptation I should be aware of?" "That’s easy," she said. "I can sum it up in one word: entitlement. Some authors have a lot of influence after they become well known. They change. They walk into a room, acting as if everyone owes them and the world revolves around them. It makes them miserable to work with."

“Entitled leaders act as if the world revolves around them. Their thinking goes something like this: I’ve been blessed. I have gifts and influence. I have worked hard and deserve to be treated well. This is what I refer to as “power over” others leadership. The opposite of an entitled leader is a grateful leader. Grateful leaders continually marvel at all they have received from God. But as a leader’s sense of gratitude shrinks, their sense of entitlement grows in equal measure.”

“As leaders, we are stewards of delegated power gifted to us for a short time by God. The choice of the word steward is important. The church belongs to God, not to us. We must never forget that the power we exercise belongs to him. Our power is given to us to come under people for their good, for them to flourish, not so we will look good.”

“Another indicator I monitor in my own life to ensure I am using my power to come under others is to examine my heart. I watch to see if I am still grateful for the privilege to represent Jesus and have a level of influence in the lives of other people. Perhaps the best test I know for alerting me that I have strayed from a healthy use of power is when I resent people treating me like the servant I claim to be.”

## **Ten Principles for Exercising Power and Wise Boundaries**

1. Do an honest inventory of the power God has granted you.
2. Meet with a mature spiritual companion when you find yourself triggered.
3. Enlist wise counsel to monitor dual relationships.
4. Watch for early warning signs of danger.
5. Be sensitive to cultural, ethnic, gender, and generational nuances.
6. Release people (paid and volunteer) in a loving way.
7. Remember that the burden to set boundaries and keep them clear falls on the person with greater power.
8. Be friends with friends, a pastor to parishioners, a mentor to mentorees, and a supervisor to volunteers/employees.
9. Meditate on Jesus' life as you encounter the suffering and loneliness of leadership.
10. Ask God for grace to forgive your "enemies" — and yourself.

### **Acknowledge and monitor dual relationships**

"Paul found himself in a dual role — that of both friend and boss/spiritual authority. This led to blurred boundaries and confusion around their relationship that couldn't survive the sudden shift in roles the crisis required."

### **The Challenge of Dual Relationships**

"I do not believe it is healthy or biblical to try to entirely eliminate dual relationships from Christian leadership. Drawing rigid professional boundaries in a church or para-church organization may well limit what God is doing. These boundaries simply need to be prudently and carefully monitored."

"The responsibility to set a healthy boundary rests first with the leader, not with those he or she serves. Why? The leader has been given the greater power. Following through on this responsibility isn't easy. It requires self-awareness, thoughtfulness, the ability to have honest and clear conversations, and a healthy level of confidence and personal maturity."

### **The Challenge of Family**

### **The Challenge of Close Friendships**

"Let me repeat this: I do not believe it is healthy or biblical to try to eliminate dual relationships from Christian leadership."

## **Chapter 9: Endings and New Beginnings**

“The failure wasn’t a moral one, but it was failure nonetheless — a failure to discern the reality and necessity of the endings and new beginnings that were staring at them as a church. ...The church had no biblical framework to provide wisdom and courage as they approached this necessary ending, and so the board did too little too late.”

### **The Continuum of Endings in Leadership**

“Not every problem can or should be solved or overcome; some things just need to be allowed to die. This isn’t necessarily a failure. Often it is an indication that one chapter has ended and a new one is waiting to be written. This happens in our personal lives as well as in leadership.”

“I would say leaders experience even more endings and losses than the average person. Such losses may span a continuum from large to small, but a loss is a loss, and each one leaves its mark on us. To a greater or lesser degree, these endings drain our energy and diminish our ability to rise for the next challenge. They knock us off balance — at least for a time.”

“Change is difficult for most people. We experience it as an unwelcome intruder derailing our hopes and plans. We prefer to remain in control and to operate in familiar patterns, even when they fail to serve us well. We might acknowledge intellectually that God can bring new beginnings and precious gifts out of our losses, but it somehow doesn’t ease the sting of loss or prevent us from trying to avoid it. It isn’t easy to trust the inner voice of the Spirit inviting us to cross over into this painful and unknown new territory.”

### **Characteristics of Endings and New Beginnings in Standard Practice**

“Why do we often miss God’s new beginnings, the new work he is doing? We miss seeing what is ahead in part because we fail to apply a central theological truth — that death is a necessary prelude to resurrection. To bear long-term fruit for Christ, we need to recognize that some things must die so something new can grow. If we do not embrace this reality, we will tend to dread endings as signs of failure rather than opportunities for something new.”

#### **We View Endings as Failures to Be Avoided**

“Endings feel like a failure, and failures are painful. So what do we do? We avoid them by whatever means possible. We mistakenly believe that our responsibility as a leader is to always keep things going — even if they aren’t working — and to keep our people from experiencing the pain of loss.”

#### **We View Endings as Disconnected from Spiritual Formation in Jesus**

“For most of my leadership life, I have viewed endings as obstacles to be removed or fixed — quickly. My anxiety level, often accompanied by heaviness and tension in my body, increased exponentially when I realized some person or program wasn’t working. I ramped up my efforts to fix things in a misguided effort to avoid any potential future pain. I viewed these situations as the

inevitable “blows and arrows” that accompany leadership. I never once connected any of them to my personal maturing in Christ. If anything, I listened less, not more, to what God might be trying to communicate through the pain.”

“It never entered my head to ask: Lord, how are you using this to help me depend more deeply on you? ...What new beginnings might be hidden as a gift within this loss? How might I and those I lead be on the threshold of resurrection and new life we couldn’t experience any other way?”

### **We Disconnect Endings from Our Family-of-Origin Issues**

- Did my family deny or minimize loss and endings?
- Did my family blame others, demanding that someone or something was always to blame for a loss?
- Did my family members distance themselves from endings and losses by intellectualizing them or manufacturing half-truths to soften the painful reality of what really happened?
- Did my family retain a sense of hope and expectancy of what the future might bring — even when things were at their worst?

## **Characteristics of Emotionally Healthy Endings and New Beginnings**

### **We Accept That Endings Are a Death**

“Before a new beginning can emerge, an ending must take place — and that ending must be final.<sup>3</sup> For most of my leadership, I routinely tried to hang on to the old while at the same time attempting to seize the new — just in case. It never worked. Endings are a death — and death is final.”

“While some endings happen quietly, others might more readily be characterized as a brutal crucifixion. Leadership, in particular, introduces us to the unique experience of following Jesus’ way of leading. It is, believe it or not, one of the greatest gifts we receive from him. None of us would choose this kind of death, but it nonetheless becomes a means of grace as we come to know Jesus in the “participation in his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). Paul refers to our leadership sufferings as one way we participate in the redemptive mystery of “fill[ing] up in [our] flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions” (Colossians 1:24).”

As a person who tends to resist accepting the necessity of endings, I consistently do four things to keep me on track:

- I face the brutal facts of situations where things are going badly and ask hard questions, even when everything inside me prefers to distract myself or flee.
- I remind myself not to follow my feelings during these times of embracing endings as a death. My feelings inevitably lead me to avoid what I need to face.
- I talk with seasoned mentors who are older and more experienced, asking for their perspective and wisdom.

- I ask myself two questions: What is it time to let go of in my personal life and in my leadership? And, If I embrace this death, what new thing might be standing backstage, waiting to make its entrance in my personal life and in my leadership? This second question especially encourages me to move beyond my fears, reminding me that God has something good for me in the future — even though I may not yet see any hints of what that might be.”

### **We Recognize that Endings and Waiting in the Confusing “In-Between” Often Take Much Longer than We Think**

- “Abraham waited almost twenty-five years for God to follow through on his promise of the birth of Isaac.
- Joseph waited somewhere between thirteen and twenty-two years to see his family again after being betrayed by his brothers.
- Moses waited forty years in the desert for God to resurrect a purpose for his life.
- Hannah waited years for an answer to her prayers for a child.
- Job waited years, not months, for God to reveal himself, redeem his losses, and take him into a new beginning.
- John the Baptist and Jesus waited almost thirty years before the Father’s time for their ministries came to fulfillment.”

“Why is waiting so important? God’s purpose in endings and losses is not simply about changing your external environment or circumstances. He is doing something even greater — initiating a deeper level of transformation in and through you far beyond what you may want.”

### **We View Endings and Waiting as Inextricably Linked to Our Personal Maturing in Christ**

“Much of my growth as a leader has come out of these kinds of painful, mysterious, and confusing experiences — the in-between times — over which I have so little control. When I have resisted God in such times — by simply getting busier and adding new programs, for example — I have missed the new beginnings God had for me and those I led. When I have remained with him, I discovered this in-between land of confusion was rich in insights and mercies. What looked like an empty, blurry, inactive time turned out to be the place of my most profound transformation.”

### **We Affirm that Endings and Waiting Are the Gateway to New Beginnings**

“The central truth that Jesus is risen from the dead is what enables us to affirm that endings are always a gateway to new beginnings — even when we can’t discern that anything redemptive could emerge from our loss. The key is to be willing to wait. And while we wait, we spend extended amounts of time alone with God. We process our thoughts and emotions with others or in a journal. We position ourselves as expectant pilgrims on a journey — we listen and learn, looking for and expecting to see signs of new life.”

“On the spiritual journey . . . each time a door closes, the rest of the world opens up. All we need to do is to stop pounding on the door that just closed, turn around — which puts the door behind us — and welcome the largeness of life that now lies open to our souls.”