

# Learning Leadership Lessons from 2 Corinthians

## **Why 2 Corinthians?**

To put it bluntly, 2 Corinthians saved my ministry. I've always said that there are two kinds of spiritual leaders: *Aspiring* and *Perspiring* ones, and in the mid-1990's I was one of the *Perspiring* ones! There are some people who want to be leaders, and then there are some, who at times, wonder why they ever became leaders in the first place! I was in one of those dark-night-of-the-pastor's-soul seasons (I've had several of these over the years) when the Lord led me to take 2 Corinthians as a kind of *prescription* for what ailed me. I had planted three churches and was leading two of them at the same time (don't ask me about the sanity of this!). I was in the throes of dealing with a bunch of my own inadequacies, some significant disappointments that I had with the churches, and a whole bag-full of hurt feelings. Not only did I feel like a failure, I couldn't seem to get either God or people to do what I wanted them to do. I went away for a few days to seek the Lord and try to get my head together. I was pretty bummed out about how things were going, when I found myself reading this letter over and over. I began to feel as though I was attending a leadership class taught by Paul himself. While I'll never be the leader he was, from his letter and his example, I've gleaned (and continue to do so) many valuable lessons about spiritual leadership.

For that reason I love this letter. It's been a spiritual GPS to me as a leader now for many years. In it, we have the opportunity to track many of Paul's personal leadership struggles and their attendant emotions and how he dealt with them. He had poured himself out in Corinth and the church there, and his ministry stint was often painstaking and painful. The city was full of demons and perversity, much of which had seeped into the church. At one point, Paul was at his wits end, toying with giving up, when the Lord spoke to him in a vision: "*Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.*" (Acts 18:9-10) After that he stayed another year and a half, making disciples, and fighting the good fight in one of the ancient world's most perverse cities.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church Paul referred to many of the problems among them (division, pride, immorality, law suits, divorce, idols, lovelessness, gift-expression problems, faulty doctrine, etc.). Sounds like some of the churches I've attended (and led)! In this second letter he was dealing with the rumor that was circulating in the region that he wasn't an apostle at all! This had to have been quite a hard blow with all that he'd invested in this high-maintenance church. How he handled this attack is a great model of leadership to any generation. Following his train of thought, his exhortations, and pleas in the letter we can learn a lot of life-saving *leadership lessons* for ourselves.

Please don't look to this paper as even a cursory commentary on the book of 2 Corinthians. I'm not trying to explain every verse, or even every chapter. This isn't an exegesis of the letter, as much as a gleaning of lessons from it, lessons which specifically have to do with spiritual leadership.

I know that this is not usually the first book of the Bible that comes to mind when we think of the theme of leadership. In the New Testament we would most naturally think of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), while the book of Nehemiah is often thought of as the leadership manual of the Old Testament. But I suggest to you that the Second Corinthians

Epistle is just as much a treasure of lessons on how to go about leading others in spiritual things. While every book of the Bible has something to say about it, this book is, in my opinion, a book *about leadership*.

Paul wrote the letter, in the first place, to give kind of an *apologetic* for his own leadership service for Christ. He had been backed into a corner by a group of so-called, “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11), who were breeding doubts about the legitimacy of his leadership, and was virtually forced to write what we might call - “*The Spiritual Leader’s Job Description*.” While he was painfully reluctant to *defend* his ministry at all, he felt he had to at least *define* it, so that his message would continue to be trusted. Because of this, we find the letter full of timeless lessons for leaders. I propose some of those lessons here, and urge us all to become the best servant-leaders we can possibly be!

## How To Use This Book

Is it just me? But when I’m reading a book, I seldom do more than scan the “*How To Use This Book*” section. It seems to me that I paid good money for the book, I’ll “use” it any way I very well want to! Besides – I know how to “use a book.” You read it - unless you’re low on coasters. In such case, you “use” it to prevent unsightly rings on the furniture from your ice tea. So, I’m not going to tell you how to use this book, I can only tell you how *I’ve* used it over the years with a variety of individuals and groups.

- I’ve used it one-on-one with beloved church staff members and interns. We go through one chapter per week and use it for interactive discussions and prayer over current personal issues concerning leadership (focusing lots of attention on the “Let’s Be Practical” sections.)
- I’ve taken a chapter or two, taught them to a group of pastors and other spiritual leaders, led some discussion about it, and asked them to talk and pray in pairs using the “Let’s Be Practical” suggestions.
- I’ve used it to teach leadership seminars and retreats.
- I’ve had online discussions with groups of elders in the local church.

I’ve simply encouraged leaders and potential leaders to read it and apply it in any way they feel God wants them to. And frankly, over the years, I’ve read and re-read it myself to remind myself of the things God has shown me about spiritual leadership from 2 Corinthians.

## He versus She leaders...

Generally throughout this manual, I’ve used the generic, “he/him/his” pronouns in conjunction with spiritual leaders. This is not because I’m predisposed to an exclusive male leadership in the church. It’s more about convenience, and an avoidance of the cumbersome use of the slash method (he/she). I’m also not a fan of the technique of bouncing back and forth between “he” and “she” throughout the text. This isn’t the place for debating the issue of women in spiritual leadership, but I will say this. Ladies, do everything in God’s kingdom to which you are called and for which you are gifted. To my mind, like any man, if you are spiritually prepared, morally qualified, and personally pointed by God to some form of leadership – go for it! Nevertheless, in this paper, in order to avoid the awkward alternatives, you’ll find the pronouns pretty much in the masculine form.

### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #1:**

**Leaders have a calling from God to be leaders**

## **2 Corinthians 1:1**

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother...***

God has a plan, a will, a desire, a direction He wants us to know and to go. For some, that will of God has to do with spiritual leadership. It's not just a matter of one's personal preference to be a leader. (You might want to examine your motives or get your head examined, if you simply have a human aspiration to be a leader in the Church! But if you have a sense of calling from God – go for it!) I've often told people who say they have a desire to be a spiritual leader, "Run away as fast as you can. If you can't shake this insanity and God won't let you go, then do it with all your heart for as long as He tells you to!" Spurgeon wrote, "If you're called to preach, don't stoop to be a king!" (And I would add, "...so be sure you're actually called!")

- 2 Corinthians 10:13 *We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us...*

Spiritual leadership has everything to do with *spiritual assignment*. God is the Assigner, and we are the assigned. God told Paul at the onset of his calling, "*Get up, and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.*" Acts 22:10

I've found over the years that my strong sense of personal calling to a life of service has anchored me to the work. I know that "anchored" doesn't sound very pleasant – and frankly, sometimes it hasn't been particularly pleasant. But knowing that God has clearly called and gifted me to do what I do, has kept me doing it even when I didn't want to do it anymore!

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### **Let's be practical**

- Do you have a sense of calling from God? Do you know what His will is for your life? How do you know and what will you do about it? If your calling has to do with spiritual leadership, share it with someone and ask them to pray for you to do it with all your might.
- Paul told Timothy to "remember the prophecies" he had received from others regarding his calling, and that "by them he might war a good warfare." What has God "said" to you – and how will remembering it help you be successful in the spiritual battles you face?

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### ***The call that won't go away***

Since I became a Christian at seventeen I've felt a rather intense sense of calling to live a life of service. So, from seventeen to fifty-three I pretty much gave that assignment all I had. I tried to do what Paul described, "*I labor with all the energy that God mightily inspires within me*" Colossians 1:29. Besides my personal relationship with Jesus and my love for my family, this calling to serve as a spiritual leader has been my greatest passion. It's not that I loved everything about "the ministry,"

because there were many things about being a pastor that were very distasteful to me. And secretly, I resigned from service dozens of times over the years. But the Spirit always seemed to pull me back to the original call which has anchored me when I've had very little will to continue. So, *"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service."* 1 Timothy 1:12

But I'd have to say that after some massive seismic events in my life (divorce and cancer) the sense of the call became the dimmest it's ever been. Honestly, for the better part of the first year into my losses, I had no interest in any ministry of any kind. Obviously, it was time to step back, reevaluate my life, and try to get well again. I've seen so many pastors press on in their ministries despite their lives falling apart, and it all seemed so noble. Frankly, I feel that it's often more irresponsible than noble.

Nevertheless, in addition to just trying to survive the greatest trials of my life, I was pretty disinterested in repainting the leadership target on my back. It seemed like God had let me down. All I'd lived for was him, my family, and the kingdom; and this is what I get for it? My personal relationship with him was not in question, and I had no intention of not following Jesus. I just was not interested in continuing serving him in a life of ministry.

I made it clear to my friends and family that for now at least I had no aspiration to lead anyone anywhere. Early on in my hiatus a pastor friend of mine asked me for advice about his ministry and I told him in no uncertain terms that I had absolutely *nothing* to give him or anyone else. I informed him that I may someday return to being a people helper, but that day was not *this day*. I'd always said that we serve out of the overflow, and I was on empty. I had nothing to give. During that season, my friend Jim gave me a t-shirt, which said on the front in bold letters: *"If you need any help, feel free to ask someone else!"* I wore it every chance I had – I still do.

But after about a year I began to regain my vision for serving others. And when I did, I thought the best way to summarize what I feel called to do is to: *Live a single, simple life of service.* (Yes, the operative terms do all begin with "S." And there is another integral "S" that stands for *survive* the cancer, which has to occur in order for the other three to become a reality.)

## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #2**

**Leaders are themselves, comforted comforters**

**2 Corinthians 1:3-11**

***3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted;***

***is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. 8 We do not want you to be uniformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.***

This letter contains more references to “trouble” and “tribulation” than any other book in the New Testament. But it also contains more in it about God’s “comfort” than any other. While the term “tribulation” is used 9 times, the term, “comfort” appears 29 times! There must be at least three times as much *comfort* available to us as there is *trouble* awaiting us!

The first thing we learn about comfort is that God doesn’t comfort us in order to make us *comfortable*, but to make us *comforters*! This is particularly true of spiritual leaders. It is crucial for a leader to model and teach how a person receives comfort from God in the middle of difficulty. Paul is telling us that the leader has to suffer so he can access the help of God, and thus be able to mentor others in how to access that same help for himself. The leader whose closest contact with personal pain is what they read in a book won’t very well be able to help the hurting!

I recall a painful rejection of a very close friend and colleague. I went out to one of my favorite prayer spots along the railroad tracks among the broccoli fields overlooking the ocean. At one point I just sat down on the tracks and wept over the experience. Prior to that, I hadn’t ever really taken particular note of the Psalm that says, “*God is close to the brokenhearted.*” But at that moment of pain, the Holy Spirit brought those words to me, and I took comfort in them. How often, when consoling other brokenhearted people, I’ve drawn on that verse, and the experience that brought the truth of it to my attention. *He comforted me in my troubles, so that I could comfort those in trouble with the comfort I myself had received from Him!*

Some leaders are always either *whining* or *winning*. They’re always either complaining about how hard life is or carrying on a façade of victory and triumph. Neither of those extremes is therapeutic nor helpful to others.

*“Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”* Hebrews 12:12-13 Another version translates it: *“Take a new grip with your tired hands, stand firm on your shaky legs, and mark out a straight smooth path for your feet so that those who follow you, though weak and lame, will not fall and hurt themselves but become strong.”* In other words, ‘Access God’s help with your painful circumstances so that the weak and lame who follow you will have a good example to follow on how to proceed in their difficult lives. Otherwise, they’ll fall and hurt themselves even worse!’

When Paul wrote about problems that were “*beyond their ability to endure so that they couldn’t rely on themselves, but on God*”; he’s saying that leaders have to go through times like those in order to set an example. You can only learn rely on God instead of on yourself by being in circumstances where it’s necessary.

God doesn't comfort us in order  
to make us *comfortable*,  
but to make us *comforters*!

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**Let's be practical**

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you model to others how to go through trials? In what ways could you improve?
  - Are you currently struggling with a personal difficulty which might be an opportunity for you to better learn how to access God's help, and then pass that help on to those you lead? Ask God to work in this trial in such a way as to make you a better servant-leader to others.
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**Here's an excerpt from my Memoir:**

My friend Dan and I coined the phrase, the "Sufferers Club." We came upon it quite by accident one day when we were identifying with each other's pain. We realized that we had a bond that we hadn't had in the first 25 years or so of our friendship. He had lost his two daughters to a drunk driver and I had lost my wife and health. We had spent lots of time together over the years, but now we were connecting on a level we hadn't before. We've always had things in common – we like baseball, Jesus, and classic rock. But now we've entered the world of pain and loss. We don't like it, we wish things were as they had been - but here we are and we're together.

Dan says that we're limping on opposite sides. He lost his daughters, but still has the love of his great wife, Lynn. I lost my wife, but still have the love of my fantastic kids, Luke and Rebecca. Maybe that's a key component in every good friendship; that we limp on opposing sides.

A few weeks ago I heard a young woman speak to her church on the topic of suffering. In my humble opinion, she did an excellent job. She's quite gifted, very sincere, and wise beyond her years. But I wondered if she had suffered. I wondered if she was a member of "the club." She might be. I don't know her that well.

These days when reading a book or hearing someone talk about humans in misery, I wonder if they're in the club of sufferers. Are they speaking to me from their experience or from what they've read in a book somewhere? Do they sit across from me in the cell of agony, whispering their encouragement in the dark? I'm not saying that it's illegitimate for someone who hasn't suffered to try to speak to sufferers about how to handle their pain. I myself have given many good messages on the theme (the main points all rhymed, there were introductions and conclusions, and all the Greek words used were pronounced correctly), but until these last two years, I've never known suffering personally. I think it makes a difference in how we talk about it and how we relate to others experiencing it.

You might object to the exclusive sound of this club. Well, I object to being *in* it! You can have my membership any time you want. I paid dues to get in, but against my will. I'm fully aware that everyone has some pain in their lives and that others have suffered much more than I can even imagine. It's not a competition – it's a fellowship.

Jesus, the President of the Sufferers' Club and history's greatest Sufferer is at the head of the table of fellow sufferers and from there offers a blessed interaction with him (see the next chapter) as well as a unique fellowship among those who are at the table with him. As members of the fellowship, we appear to have a deeper communion with others who have walked through some of the same shadowed valleys. Victims of abuse, divorcees, cancer survivors all seem to have a dimension of fellowship with each other that others don't have. They tend to enjoy a closeness, a shared ground for relationship. They seem to have the ability to comfort one another at the table in a way that others may not.

This may have been the problem with Job's "comforters" - they hadn't suffered. They hadn't sat at the table with fellow sufferers and therefore had no idea about what Job needed or what God wanted. Their analyses and solutions to Job's problems were off-base because they had little-to-no pain to cope with in their own lives. The way they began is the way they should've continued in their "ministry" to Job. *"They sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was."* If only they had stayed there on the ground with Job.

Contrast this with what Paul says about genuine empathy that flows between members of "The Club": *"The God of all comfort comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort that we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows... we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."* 2 Corinthians 1:4-7

## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #3**

### **Leaders need the prayers of those they lead**

#### **2 Corinthians 1:11**

***... as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.***

If I've learned anything over the years of service, especially during my seasons of difficulty, it is that I need the prayers of my friends as much as they need mine (probably even more). God's system that we pray for one another in order to unlock many of His blessings, is an interesting one. I really don't completely understand the why, the what, or even the how of prayer, especially the intercessory kind (where we pray for one another). But there are a couple of things I have picked up over the years.

First, leaders need to allow, request, even plead for the prayers of people they lead because it gives us all the opportunity to see that we are in the same boat together (the boat is called the "Fellow-ship"). We're all made of the same stuff, and each of us praying for each other reminds us of that.

It also gives us all the opportunity to partner with God in the furthering of His eternal purposes, and do it together. Remember that all of His plans come back to relationship – with Himself and with one another (love-God-and-love-one-another sort of thing). As we pray for each other we get this reinforced. Here’s how I see the process of intercessory prayer working. True prayer begins in God’s big heart of compassion for a needy person. That prayer then is inserted by God into the heart of a praying person. The praying person communicates the burden back to God in the form of a prayer. God then answers the prayer, which inspires both the needy person and the praying person to praise Him! In other words, He asks us to ask Him for stuff on behalf of our friends; then gives to our friends what we ask for; and then we thank Him (along with our friends) for how good He is and for giving us the privilege of partnering with Him!

Also, when we ask people to pray for us in our work, we’re giving them an opportunity to have a part in that work. I’m not saying that *our* work is the only work worth praying for. The work that *they* do is every bit as important as what *you* do for the Lord. But, as a leader, your work is probably more visible and noticeable than most of theirs. When you invite them to pray for you, you’re giving them a chance to participate in something beyond themselves.

One final thought on why God requires us to ask for prayer as spiritual leaders. You’ve probably noticed that it can be a little humbling to be needy in front of those who are supposed to be following you. But, if you’re like me, you need quite a bit more than a “little humbling.” The fact is, that *leaders* have just as many needs as *followers*. God has many ways of reminding us of that fact. He may allow us to be in needy situations ourselves for this very reason. He tells us to “humble ourselves,” but it seems that if we won’t, He’ll be happy to humble us – without our help!

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### Let’s be practical

- How often do you ask people, especially the people that you lead, for prayer? You probably could stand to do it more. So, ask someone today.
- Recall and re-tell a story of someone praying for you while you were in a particular need, and God answered.

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## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #4:** **Leaders live sincere and holy lives**

### **2 Corinthians 1:12**

***We have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom, but according to God’s grace.***

My friend Robby has a plaque in his office that says, “*The leader knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.*” A lot of people *know* the way, but don’t consistently *go* that way

before they start trying to *show* others the way. Nobody's perfect; we'll all stumble and fall but there's an irreducible minimum of personal holiness that's required for the spiritual servant leader. Jesus said, *"I sanctify myself that they too may be sanctified"* (John 17). People are more apt to do what you do more than do what you say they ought to do. You may be a shepherd, but first you're a sheep. You have to follow the Great Shepherd before you can tell others how to follow Him.

It takes more than charisma to lead people in the Jesus way. Oswald Chambers wrote, *"It's an easy business to preach – an appallingly easy thing to tell other people what to do. It is another thing to have God's message turned into a boomerang."* In Paul's qualifications for elders and deacons in Timothy and Titus, you'll notice that, with the exception of *"able to teach,"* all the things he lists are personal obedience issues – *above reproach, self-control, respectable, etc.*

*The leader knows the way,  
goes the way, and  
shows the way.*

Have you personally been exposed to the fallout of a fallen spiritual leader and the collateral damage that attends it? Then you know that pretty much everyone loses when a leader falls into adultery, theft, lying, and or any number of other practices that ruin the soul.

What the leader needs is *"holiness and sincerity,"* That come only *"from God... and his grace,"* and not by *"worldly wisdom."* The point? When you're "showing the way," it's got to be the way of grace, and not the way of human effort or ingenuity. You can only effectively make good disciples in so far as you live like Jesus in front of them, which is only possible when *powered by grace!*

*"Sincerity"* means to be honest in our spirituality, and have a distinct lack of pretense. We can't have something up our sleeve and be good leaders. Our spiritual influence will be as superficial as our lives. The only way to live our lives well is out in the open and not under cover of anonymity. Of all people, leaders, though tempted to be otherwise, have to be transparent and authentic in the way they express their faith. *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). Sincerity is contagious. People who are led sincerely will have a better chance of living sincerely.

For several weeks during my bone marrow transplant I had to be hospitalized. In addition to the usual patient identification bracelet on my left wrist, for the right they gave me a bright yellow plastic bracelet that simply said in bold letters, "FALL RISK." In other words, *"Watch this guy - he's wobbly, and can't be trusted while on his feet. He could fall at any time."* It meant that when I was taken out of my isolation room for tests, lest I fall over in the hall and give them more to treat than what I was in there for originally, I had to be transported in a wheel chair. Nobody wanted that, so they designated me a, *"Fall Risk."*

We're all "Fall Risks" as we do our best to walk with Jesus. All of us are at risk of falling, of tripping up on temptation, and doing any number of things stupid things that make the Lord unhappy. And if you don't think you are at risk of falling, then you are in the most danger of doing just that. *"So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall."* (1

Corinthians 10:12) Maybe this will catch on as the new Christian bracelet, replacing the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) with, "FALL RISK!" Probably not.

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### **Let's be practical**

- *"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." (Jude 24)* Since cancer turned one of the vertebrae in my neck to mush and I had titanium rods and plates inserted to prop up my spine, I've been rather vigilant to avoid falling. I think about it mostly when getting in the shower with all that slippery water and soap, so I quote this verse every time I carefully step into the tub. Then I ask the Lord to help me not fall either physically or spiritually all day long. Either could be devastating to my frail self. I can't afford to fall in the bathtub and re-break my neck or fall into sin and damage my soul. I urge you to identify specific holes into which you are most apt to fall, and humbly ask God (daily) to keep you from falling.
  - If you don't yet have an accountability partner, get one immediately (if not sooner). This is a person to whom you can confess your struggles and get prayer for improvement. *"Confess your faults to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed"* (James 5:16)
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### **The Dream (part 1) "The Flappy Shirt"**

Some years ago I had a dream that I believe was generated from the Lord. In the dream I was swimming in a public pool, and an obese teenage boy playfully jumped on my back, expecting me to carry him across to the other side. I'm a very good swimmer (in the non-dream world, that is), and took him up on the challenge. But he proved too big a test, even for my aquatic prowess, and together we began to sink. I stroked frantically, gasping for air, until we finally arrived at the pool wall. I got the boy off my back and anxiously caught my breath. I was exhausted and terrified from our near-drowning escapade!

The boy, not nearly as traumatized as I, sprang up and said, *"Let's do it again!"* At that, he jumped on my back again and we were repeating the former insanity! For some insane reason I complied, and before long I was again gasping for oxygen while swimming with all my might. This time there was another factor that made our hope of survival even more untenable. While fighting to stay above water, with a heavy teenage boy on my back, I was wearing a short-sleeved button-down shirt. If the attire itself weren't enough, the shirt was unbuttoned and un-tucked! It was flapping in the water, tangling around my flailing arms, making the irrational trek even crazier. Half way across the pool I woke up out of my dream in a sweaty terror. The dream itself was over, but left unfinished. I was enormously relieved to be awake and back in the real world, but was left hanging about the outcome of the foolhardy swim.

Through it the Lord made clear to me two distinct spiritual lessons. Since the preceding chapter is about personal holiness, I'll mention the lesson pertaining to that theme first. The "flappy shirt" represented compromise with sinful activity. It was a warning from the Lord about getting tangled up with unhealthy and impure habits.

Tucking the shirt in and buttoning it was an option, but the obvious need was to shed myself of it altogether. I could try, I felt the Lord saying to me, to minimize sin's impediment. But discarding it altogether is the obvious call. It's a no-brainer that even the best of swimmers can't swim in a flappy shirt, especially when trying to swim for two.

Spiritual leadership, the Spirit showed me, without purity is insanity. My role was to try to help people not drown, but if I'm tangled up in sin, I'll drown along with them!

The "swimming for two" is the other lesson from the dream. But we'll wait till after the next chapter to talk about that.

## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #5:** **Leaders are not lords.**

### **2 Corinthians 1:24**

***Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.***

This verse speaks to the universal temptation of the leader to "lord it over" those of whom he has charge. To date, I've been particularly touched by this temptation during two seasons in my ministry. The first was when I was young and more insecure than now. I was experiencing relative "success" in my life of service (I hate the term "success" in relation to ministry, but I'll settle for it for now), and "lording it over people" simply seemed like the most direct route to continued success. Anything except just telling people what to do with their lives seemed just too slow! To wait for people to develop their own convictions rooted in the Word takes time. Giving the Holy Spirit space to do his thing in people seemed too glacially slow for my youthful taste. I didn't have the patience to let people try, fail, and discover God's ways for themselves. Nor did I have very much confidence in the Spirit to do what He alone could do in their lives.

The other season in which I was strongly tempted to "lord it over" was while pastoring people who just weren't getting it! Many of them were not hungry, not responsible, not obedient, and not even growing in their faith. It's so tempting to run the lives of people like that since they're not running them very well themselves!

Paul tells us that the alternative to lording it over people is to "work with them for their joy." You've got to have your prepositions right on this passage. He doesn't say, "work for them with their joy." That would be "lording it over them" – that is, doing it *for* them while they just tag along like puppy dogs on a leash. You talk to God, get the word of the Lord *for* them, and then tell them so they can go along for the ride. You're the driver and they're the passengers! Tempting? Yes. It's not only because "power corrupts," but also because they might not go along at all if you don't do the driving. And the fact of the matter is, they might not. But if I

drive them, they might only go along as long as I drive. And I can't drive everyone everywhere!

We don't work *for* them, but *with* them. This is an altogether different approach to leadership. I'm not supposed to be *behind* them driving them. I'm *next to* them encouraging, modeling, instructing, and praying for them. My goal then is to *serve God with them* and *serve them with God*. We're at *His bidding* (not theirs), and with *His power* (not ours) serving.

Speaking of "power corrupting and absolute power corrupting absolutely," I urge every spiritual leader to read the book, *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell with this theme of spiritual leadership in mind. This book will most definitely smoke out any vestige of "lording it over" in the leadership culture of a local church. Read it if you dare!

Paul went on to say that his goal was, "*for their joy*." It wasn't *his* joy, but *theirs* that motivated him to serve. I sometimes forget whose joy I'm working toward and leading for. I have to remember it's not about *my* joy. It's not about me having a fulfilling life or a "successful ministry." My preoccupation should be *their* joy, which they won't achieve if all they do is go blindly and childishly along for the ride, with me doing all the driving. They'll have joy when they take responsibility for their own lives and decide to grow – with or without my contribution. But if I am able to contribute in some way, we'll both have joy and everybody wins!

He said, "...*it's by faith that you stand firm*." That's where we want our disciples – "*standing firm!*" They'll never be able to do that if I lord it over them. They'll never build a strong personal faith if I do everything for them, while they stand by and watch me do it.

**My goal then is to serve  
God with them and  
serve them with God.**

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### Let's be practical

- On a scale of 1 to 10 how much do you enjoy telling people how to live their lives? How much do you trust the Holy Spirit to work in people? Anyway, to whom are you leading them?
- Ask yourself the question, "How much do I need to be needed ... to be followed? Am I leading or lording?"

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### **The Dream (part 2) "Swimming for Two"**

In the previous chapter I told about a prophetic dream I had. Remember, there was a young, overweight boy that jumped on my back to carry him to the other side of a public pool and then, after a short gasp of breath, back again. I was wearing a flappy

shirt, which represented sinful habits. The Lord showed me that I had shed such habits altogether, which would make any such effort impossible.

As I prayed about it, I saw that it was a two-for-one dream, and that there was another spiritual leadership lesson that I needed to learn from it. The first lesson was about being encumbered by sin and the second about being weighed down by people who want me to transport them to heaven. The Spirit convicted me about trying to carry people on my back. He showed me that I can't be doing their swimming for them. I'm not able, not for very long anyway, to swim for two. I'm no *Cruise Ship for Christians*, doing for them what they should be doing for themselves. Not only is it unscriptural, it's untenable, and it's dangerous!

On the other hand, I can be, and am even called to be a *lifeguard* for the drowning and a *swimming instructor* for those want to learn how to swim on their own. *Lifeguards* save people who can't yet swim (that's evangelism). *Swim instructors* teach people how to swim for themselves (that's discipleship). *Cruise ships*, on the other hand, take it upon themselves to do all the work to make their passengers happy and comfy, and show them interesting and exotic sights along the way. That's definitely not the call of the spiritual leader.

Take it from me; it's exhausting to carry people on your back. It's especially treacherous when the people you're carting are carrying nothing for themselves but a bunch of extra fat! It's not God's way that they depend on you to do all the work, while all they do is overeat and under-exercise.

The ridiculous part of my dream – well, it's all pretty ridiculous – is that when the boy jumped on my back for second insane ride across the wide public pool, I complied! I went along with it. Though I could have refused and shaken him off, with him on top of me, I began the return journey, flailing for the both of us.

Therapists call this “codependence,” which, as a model of ministry, is damaging and addictive to both parties. Though both the swimmer and his lazy cargo sink to the bottom, there's something in both that wants to keep doing it this way!

Another interesting twist is that the boy was the same age as the number of years I had been pastoring the church I was serving at the time. It was clear to me that the Lord was saying, “*Your shoulders are not broad enough, and your strength not great enough to carry these people and I'm not asking you to. Quit doing for them what they should be doing for themselves. Just shed your own sinful entanglements, rescue the drowning, and teach people how to swim for themselves. Not only will you and they be kept from drowning, but together you'll enjoy the swim.*”

## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #6**

**Leaders have a deep affection for those they lead**

**2 Corinthians 2:4**

***For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.***

Youth ministry in my home church was my first pastoral assignment. I had heard others speak of the “*pastor’s heart*” when referring to the spiritual concern that pastors have for God’s people. And though, at the time, I didn’t know exactly what it was, I knew I didn’t have one. I liked people (pretty much), but I rarely *loved* them, and virtually never cared enough to unselfishly watch over their souls. Since I was supposed to shepherd these teenagers, I thought it might be nice if I had this mysterious *heart of a pastor*, and so I asked God for it. Over the next 3 years I found myself gradually caring, loving, weeping, praying for these kids like I never thought possible. God was doing something new in me. He was giving me His heart, His concern for the people He loves. It was something more than Him helping me love them - *He was loving them through me.*

*“The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 1:14*

*“We were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our own lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.” 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8*

I don’t know that it would be true to say that you have to be a “people person” in order to be a spiritual leader (that’s more of a personality type). You might not be particularly gregarious or have that born-in warm personality, but you will pretty much have to let Jesus love people through you in order to lead them. If you’re not the “loving type,” don’t despair. I know it’s possible for God to change you in this area, like he did me. The Apostle John, who came to be known as the “*Apostle of Love*,” had been formerly called one of the “*Sons of Thunder*.” Remember, he was the one (along with his brother) who wanted to call down fire on those who rejected Jesus. Fortunately, he grew from there to become a tender spiritual father to many. Instead of fire from heaven, he progressed to calling down heaven’s love on his friends.

This goes way beyond being nice or polite. It has to do with a deep-down passion and compassion for your fellow humans (Christian or not). It’s a devotion (which is more than just an emotion) to their progress as disciples of Jesus. It’s an *attitude* that leads to *actions*, which is something I call a, “*Christian ACTitude*.” We’re commanded to practice both attitudes and actions; and it’s my experience that right *attitudes* tend to lead to better *actions* – thus the word, “*ACTitude*.” It’s a bent toward putting your own desires and needs aside for the good of others. Leaders who love, are ones who seek to model the extravagant love of the Lord to all people. They know they’re loved by God, and yearn for others to know it too. Their job description is to be “God’s love with skin on it!” In their interactions with people, they know that they represent His way of caring about others. They’re “shepherds” (lower case) leading people after the spirit of “The Great Shepherd.”

***“What just happened here?”***

We were all dazed by what we had just seen. We were a collection of men from the church on a camping trip on the Russian River. Every year we went canoeing down the river and camped that night. We had returned, exhausted, from our all day “competitive boating trip” (to be distinguished from the more placid approach than

saner people take), and were sitting on stones around the blazing camp fire that night. We were singing songs and sharing the good things of God with one another when Travis eked out a confession of sin in his life. Humbly he told us about how he had been disappointing the Lord for quite some time with a particular activity, and was asking us, his friends, for prayer to make a change.

If that weren't shocking enough, Henry got up while Travis was talking and filled a pan with water and found a semi-clean rag. He bent down in front of his friend and began to wash his feet. While taking off Travis' shoes and socks, soaking the wash cloth in the water, and gently stroking his feet, he began reminding us that Jesus did this with his disciples, and then told them to do it with each other. Henry said the reason Jesus wants us to do this is that when we wash one another's feet we're getting close enough to one another to recognize where we've been. When you have someone's feet in your hands, Henry told us, you're looking at the consequences of where they've walked, and helping them deal with it. He said we all pick up filth from the places through which we've passed. We need someone to represent Jesus, to hear our story, understand our journey, and get intimately enough involved with us that, in the name of the Lord, they wash our dirty feet.

We all sat stunned for a long while. Jim broke the silence with his query, "What just happened here?" All we could do was be with Jesus and with one another for the rest of the night around the fire of his love.

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### Let's be practical

- Think about the person for whom you tend to have the least amount of love. Ask the Lord to "*pour out*" the love you need (see 1 Timothy 1:14 above) for this person. And then ask him to give you an opportunity to show that love for them in a practical way real soon.
- If love is the "rule of thumb" for the leader, the default position for the way we treat people in general, how will you model this value and cultivate more of a culture of love in the ministry that you have?

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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #7:**

**Leaders who are competent are people whose confidence is in God**

#### **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**

***Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant --not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the***

## ***Spirit gives life.***

As a young and inexperienced pastor I received a call that one of the teenagers from our church had been in a near-fatal car accident. By that time I had never yet visited anyone in any hospital for any reason. In fact, I had never stepped foot in a hospital before then. I was young, idealistic, a bit cocky, and self-reliant. I was full of faith (more like full of *myself*) and was sure I was going to pray an effective healing prayer and see a miracle in that hospital room. I envisioned the girl getting immediately well and the family all being greatly encouraged by *my ministry*. Well, it didn't turn out exactly the way I'd hoped. The moment I stepped into her hospital room and saw Cindy all bruised and broken beyond recognition, I literally turned and ran out of the room, shedding tears of shock for what I had just seen. The family wasn't inspired, nor was Cindy healed. My proud swagger instantly turned to a nervous sweat, and I began the process of learning the life-long lesson that my competence comes from God, and not from me.

Paul wanted to make sure it didn't sound like he was taking any credit for the good stuff that happened in his ministry, or that he was relying on his own resources to do what he did for God. He knew what spiritual leaders should lean on for their power source, credibility, and competence. *"We're competent, all right - but not because we're clever or educated, but because we receive our competence from God!"* (My paraphrase) He said in another place, *"We labor with all the energy which He mightily inspires within us!"* (Colossians 1:29)

The longer I lead people toward Jesus, the more conscious I am of my inability to do it. I think I've come to the realization that in many ways I'm a "Fair-Weather-Leader." I lead pretty well when things are advancing, people are following, and God is blessing. I don't lead so well when things are at a standstill – or worse, regressing – when people are failing, and when God doesn't seem to be blessing. In both kinds of times, I have to remember not to *"claim anything for myself,"* and that my *"competence comes from God"* alone!

God didn't choose me to do this because He knew I'd be good at it! He chose me because He knew, though I wasn't going to be particularly good at it, I would let Him empower me to do it anyway! I call it, *"Dedicated Incompetence."* I'm incompetent, but at least I've dedicated my incompetence to Him.

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### **Let's be practical**

- If you feel incompetent as a leader, read 1 Timothy 1:12. Meditate heartily on the phrase, *"who has given me strength."*
- List several instances in which God indeed gave you strength to do some leadership task (i.e. teach, counsel, rebuke, love, guide...), and then thank Him for making you a *competent* leader!

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**God didn't choose me to do this because  
He knew I'd be good at it!**

He chose me because  
He knew, though I wasn't going to be  
particularly good at it, I would  
let Him empower me to do it anyway!

### **“Empty Cup Ministries”**

One of my best friends was a former heroin addict become Christian become street preacher evangelist. His name was Ed Wong. He was not just a *good* man, but in my estimation a *great* man; and others agree with me on that. You've noticed that I'm speaking of him in the past tense. That's because he died of cancer a couple of years ago. It happened right in the middle of my marital breakup.

Ed had been battling the disease for more than a year. He was failing, and though we were close, I didn't share with him what I was experiencing at home, because he had a plateful as it was. One day I was at the mall and I called Ed to check on him. He told me the doctors had given him no more than a couple of months to live. As I prayed for him over the phone, my pain for him got all mushed up with the pain of losing my wife and I began weeping uncontrollably. I had gone into the parking lot to pace and talk on the phone. The problem was my car was on the other side of the mall and I couldn't get there fast enough to not make a fool of myself in the open air, crying my eyes out praying with my dying friend. Bad day!

A couple of weeks later something happened that was like another knife jammed into my heart in relation to the failure of my marriage. I was reeling from it when I got the call from Ed's wife, "We can't wake him up." I jumped into my car to drive to the City while yelling loudly *at*, and pleading pitifully *with* God all the way up there. Throughout the drive, the neck pain that I had been experiencing during the past weeks increasingly intensified. "*What is it you want?! What can I do for you?! Is this the best you can do?!*" I was beside myself with fear and anger and grief. I had just lost my wife, now (a month later) I was about to lose one of my best friends! As I drove, my neck just got worse and worse. I had lived with back and neck pain most of my adult life, but this was approaching something horribly new.

When I got to his house it was full of grieving people. Ed had already passed and was with the Lord; his body was on his bed where he had breathed his last. This was the man many of us counted on to hold high the bar of spiritual intensity. We looked to him as an example of disciplined and sacrificial service to Jesus. With this brother of mine I had laughed and cried many times. I loved this man and I miss him terribly. I'm certainly not nearly the only one who feels this way. He left behind a devoted wife, three great children, and many friends and admirers.

It was grief multiplied in the house (maybe 15 weeping people) – his body still on the bed awaiting the coroner's office to pronounce him dead. Most there looked to me to do the pastoral thing (you know - be strong, quote the Bible, give hope). I felt about as far from *pastoral* as one can feel. I know this because I'd felt "pastoral" pretty much non-stop for 30 years. And I had been in situations like this several times before, as the one to whom people looked. But that day, I was hurting in my body and soul big time! I'd endured massive loss in the last month and now my friend Ed is gone. I was sinking.

Someone handed me a guitar and asked me to sing some worship songs – something I was usually apt to do, but not on this day. But what are you gonna say - “No”? So I sang and prayed and “pastored” – no one there knowing that my heart and neck were suffering from other pains. I knew that Ed would do the same if it were me there dead in that bed (and believe me, I did wish a time or two that it was!). I’m really not trying to whine or get you to feel sorry for me. I’m merely painting the picture such as it was.

After most of the people had cleared out of the house, Ed’s wife, Liz, asked me to preach at his funeral. I was on empty. No, I was way *below* empty if that’s possible. But again, what are you going to say to a good friend and grieving widow? To top it off, his oldest daughter asked me to sing a song at the funeral, a song I had never heard. Now, I’ve been a preacher for 30 years. Telling the good news about Jesus in front of a bunch of people is my thing. It’s what I do. I may or may not be very good at it, but it is what I have a passion for. Singing in front of people is something I’ve done over the years (usually in leading worship), but it’s not nearly my *main* thing. I can do it, but I’m not particularly gifted at it. Again, what are you gonna say to a grieving daughter?! For all they knew, I was fine – my marriage was intact, I was pastoring as always, and healthy as could be. *“Sure. I’ll do it. Anything else?”*

A few days later there were many people at the funeral of this great Christian. Only a few of them knew my plight and I was determined to keep it that way for the moment. This was Ed’s day. It was the day we reflected on his impact on our lives. So, as requested, I preached as best I could under the circumstances. Frankly, I had never been so empty in all my life. But God, seemed to use it to bless others, albeit completely without my help. People were responding to my meager efforts to call them to higher ground. Some stood to commit themselves to Jesus for the first time and some came back to the Lord. I knew Ed would want me to challenge them this way. In fact, I was convinced that he’d wait till I got to heaven, and get in my face if I hadn’t done it! God’s help and anointing was so evident that day that my friend Dan (who knew my plight) suggested that from that point on I call my ministry, *“Empty Cup Ministries.”*

## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #8:**

**Leaders lead in the Lord, not by the letter.**

### **2 Corinthians 3:6-18**

**6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant --not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! 12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is**

**read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

The spiritual leader faces many temptations. There are the personal temptations of the flesh to sin sexually, materially, and egoistically. Someone summarized these as: *Girls, gold and glory*. These are the temptations to *live in the flesh*. But then there are also the temptations for those who serve by leading, to *lead in the flesh*. We've spoken of at least one of these already - the temptation to "lord it over" those we serve.

Here in Chapter 3, we're warned about another form of leading in the flesh. Paul calls it, "*the ministry of the letter*," which, we're told, results in nothing but "*death*." He's referring to the approach to service that depends on rules, regulations, and policies rather than the work of the Spirit through the truth of His Word.

Paul is emphatic that his ministry is not just so much religious control over the masses. He's not just advocating laws for people to obey. His ministry is rooted in connecting people with the glory of God through the Spirit of God. He's merely a messenger to call people to let down the veil and let *God* change their lives from the inside-out.

As a spiritual leader, I'm trying to lead people to an encounter with the Spirit who will change them from the inside-out to be more and more like Jesus! It's the Holy Spirit who does this radical and liberating transformation. I want people to be able to look full-faced at Jesus, experience His glory, and by the power of the Spirit, grow into His likeness! I don't want a ministry of the "*letter*." I know I can't do the life-changing. It's not my sermons or my wise counsel that does what needs to be done. All I can do is lead them to the Spirit, so that he can give them life and power to change. When I'm leading people this way, I'm challenging them toward God's grace-goals for them, and pointing them to receive His grace to reach those goals.

### **Don't rope sheep!**

I had seen a live Nativity scene at a church and thought it was a great idea. We too could have live Joseph, Mary, shepherds, real animals – the whole deal. We didn't have our own church facility, the Lutherans were gracious enough to share, so with their permission we'd use their grounds for our simple yuletide scene. A couple of the men built a small barn-like structure (even though Jesus was probably born in a cave), we made up the cast from church members, and the only animals we could get to the scene that first year were a few sheep from the local 4-H Club.

The problem was, we were all pretty suburban, and knew little-to-nothing about sheep. One of the guys built a pen that seemed sufficient to all of us, about three and half feet high. These were full-grown animals (at least they looked full grown to my keen agrarian eye), plump as could be. No way they were high jumping the fence.

On the first night of the production I came to the scene. Everything was in place, ready to go, except for the sheep. The pen was empty and my key person, Michael, was missing. I inquired about him and the sheep, and I was told they (the sheep) had easily sprang out of the pen and Michael went after them. I was amazed at two things. First, that those fat animals could jump so high was totally

unexpected. The sheep I had always imagined, and counted while trying to get to sleep, jumping over fences were so much skinnier! Secondly, I was shocked that it was Michael who went after them. He wasn't really a farmer/rancher/animal-lover type. Michael was always well-dressed, never dirty, a more into malls than meadows kind of guy.

I asked which way they'd gone and took out after them. The only thing I knew about sheep was what I had read in sermon-prep (they show up quite a bit in the Bible). I'm sure you're seeing the irony of this – the shepherds out looking for their lost sheep. Yet another thing they didn't prepare us for in Bible College!

Jeff, the guilty pen-builder had also joined the sheep hunt, and since we were fresh out of sheep dogs we armed ourselves with ropes. How else do you capture sheep? After trudging through a muddy hillside we found them. There they were, huddled together in someone's back yard. And then we did it. We slipped our ropes around their necks and tied knots that were definitely not the knot you'd use to rope a sheep! But since we didn't know the authorized sheep knot, and there was no way we were calling 4-H to ask them, we did what we could. By the way, we never told this story to the 4-H people, so keep this quiet. I'm not sure what the other guys imagined, but in my mind, these fat, yet nimble creatures were just going to obey the subtle tugs on our ropes and follow us home. That's not exactly what happened.

Apparently, sheep don't respond well to roping. At least these didn't. Their response was to emphatically resist, and then lie down on their stomachs with all four legs spread out to the sides. The more we pulled, the more they objected, and the tighter the ropes around their necks became. That's right. We put the ropes around their necks! Where would *you* have put them? Their stomachs were too large, and they don't have but tiny tails. We had them by the throat, so to speak. But they didn't seem to understand that it would be to their benefit to just go with us calmly – a nice loosely fitting noose is always better than a tight one. But what do sheep know? I'd been told they were dumb. Now I know it. The problem was I didn't know what to do about it. I guess that makes me as dumb, or dumber, than they.

Spiritual lessons aside, we still had to get the animals back to our serene nativity scene for show-and-tell. We were pulling, they were refusing, their eyes beginning to bug out. Since sheep don't seem to make much noise (they weren't growling or hissing or barking or anything), the only noise we could hear was them gasping as our ropes choked off their air. I thought at one point my sheep (the one I was tugging on) stopped breathing! I'm begging you, please don't tell the 4-H, the SPCA, or any farmer-types about this. None of the animals died or were permanently damaged, other than a little PTSD. Even if this were to get out, I think the statute of limitations has passed, and we are no longer in jeopardy of prosecution.

We also learned that sheep don't respond to reasoning, yelling, or cussing. (I think I heard one of the other guys say a bad word. I myself only thought bad words.) We pulled, we pushed, and we prayed. Inch by inch we made our way back to the site where the baby Jesus was waiting for his farm animals. We were filthy and the animals were exhausted. I think I heard one child ask his mother why the sheep looked sick. We added height to the pen (about another six feet). Now it looked more like a jail than a sheep pen. Everyone took their places. Serenity was restored and Jesus had animals at his birthday.

What we have here is a parable of ignorant shepherds taking stubborn sheep where they don't want to go in a way that they don't want to be taken. Sheep do what they want. Watch them and pray they won't jump the fence. Don't rope them. It only makes things worse.

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## Let's be practical

- Do you have a “ministry that condemns men,” or one that “brings righteousness?” Ask someone you trust what they think about your spiritual leadership in this regard.
  - Do you see people whom you are leading being “transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory?” If not, ask God if part of the reason might be that you are ministering *the letter* more than *the Lord of the letter*.
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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #9: Leaders motivated by mercy don't lose heart.**

#### **2 Corinthians 4:1**

***Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.***

The theme of this entire fourth chapter is: *“How Not To Lose Heart While in Spiritual Leadership.”* If this book is a banquet of lessons on spiritual leadership, this chapter is the main course. The key to the chapter is the statement Paul makes both at the beginning and at the end: *“We don't lose heart”* (verses 1 and 16). Everything in between these, Paul is telling us how he goes about keeping himself from losing heart as a spiritual leader in difficult times.

A lot of things make me lose heart – when people are unresponsive, when circumstances are out of my control, when demons attack, when I see how inadequate I am, when God's timing is too slow for my taste, when I become competitive with other ministries, when I'm weary. This chapter helps me not give up.

The first thing Paul refers to as a deterrent to losing heart is the realization that God's “mercy” gave us this ministry assignment to begin with. His mercy for the hurting helps me not to lose heart in serving them as a spiritual leader. I figure if He can love and serve them; with His strength surging through me, so can I!

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* (Matt. 9:35-38)

I feel humbled when I realize that I'm, in some small way, an answer to that prayer. He's mercifully asked me to partner with Him as He shows His mercy to the harassed and helpless. I'm motivated to press on by the mercy He employed to save me, gift me, call me and use me. I was given this ministry by Someone Who knew me intimately before giving it to me. He knew my shortcomings and weaknesses, and still chose me. So, how can I lose heart while serving; when He, Who knows me so thoroughly, and yet loves me so completely, called me to serve!

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Let's be practical!

- If you're apt to lose heart in the ministry, or if you are at a point in time when you are losing heart; please pay close attention to what you read in the next several "Leadership Lessons." Read this fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians a few times and ask the Holy Spirit to make it real to you.

- I once heard someone say, "If you think it's incredible that you don't have as great a ministry as you think you deserve, I propose to you that it's incredible that you have any ministry at all!" Think about what kind of mercy you've received to even know Him, let alone have the privilege of serving God and people as a spiritual leader. Now thank Him for it.

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***Lord, I know I'm going to make mistakes, but may my mistakes be small and seldom. If I have to blow it, may I not blow it big time or all the time...***

We had just finished the construction of a new church facility. Everything was new from carpet to candles, from basement to baptistery. It was Halloween night, a Saturday, and as Youth Pastor I was in charge of filling the baptistery for the following day. I entered the sanctuary, turned on the spigot (which rhymes with Wiget), and left for another part of the church property where we were having a college-age Harvest Party. (As Christians, we don't celebrate Halloween per se. We just steal some of the traditions and of it and call it, "Harvest.") Everyone was dressed in costume, and though I despise wearing costumes, I was dressed as a hobo. We were having a ball playing games, eating (have you ever noticed how much food is consumed at Christian events?), and just being silly. I was supervising the bobbing-for-apples game, when one of the *bobbers* was one of the young women (so really more of a *"bobbette"*) being baptized the next day. When she brought her wet face out of the water with an apple in her mouth, I thought of how ironic it was that in the next room the very next day she would be lifted even wetter from the waters of baptism in front of our congregation. This thought gave way to the realization that it had been a couple of hours since I had begun to fill the baptismal tank – the same one that only took about a half hour to fill!

I ran into the sanctuary hoping for the best, and what I saw was something very less than what could be considered on any planet, the "best." Keep in mind that this facility had just been completed after years of personal sacrifice of the entire congregation. Water was everywhere! Well, let's not exaggerate. It wasn't everywhere. It was just covering the huge stage in the front of our place of worship, cascading down the steps, through the pews, into the return air ducts,

and soaking the carpet in the two rooms adjacent to the stage. It might as well have been everywhere. I tore back into the other room to recruit everyone from the party to help sop up the water. Yes, I did stop first to turn off the water.

I called 2 elders, 3 deacons, and the Fire Department (I heard they had powerful water removal vacuums and stuff). I called everybody but the Senior Pastor. I just didn't want to bother the man of God preparing for his sermon for the next day (or something like that). We looked a sight, all dressed in funky costumes, sopping, mopping, tearing back the new carpet to dry. The next day, of course, my stupidity was already legendary. The first person I encountered was the pastor's wife coming up the walkway to the church. Evidently my invisible pills weren't working, and when she saw me coming she burst out in uproarious and ear-splitting laughter. This woman had a great sense of humor and genuinely thought this was somehow comical. It would have been more bearable had she yelled at me or something.

If you're wondering why I told this story on myself; it goes with the *small and seldom mistakes goal* of mine. In other words, I try not to make the same mistake twice. Read on...

It was winter some years later in Santa Cruz, and though the ocean always beckons for a good public demonstration of how Jesus changes lives, it was just too cold to venture out to the beach. So I asked a fellow-pastor if we could use their church's baptistry. He hospitably consented and hooked me up with a deacon who would loan me a church key and show me how to get the tank filled. He put the plug in the bottom, which was just like a bathtub plug. The thing didn't have a chain or any other way to pull it out in order to drain it, so he told me you had to pull it up with your toe. (This has nothing to do with the story. I just thought it was kind of curious.) He started the water and told me that since it took a couple of hours to fill, it would be just fine if I wanted to leave it, do some errands or whatever, and return to turn it off. I told him about my previous act of stupidity, and that if it was all the same to him, I'd stay and watch every drop go into that tank, and turn it off way before it even came close to the top. That's exactly what I did, and do you know, that this thing was completely full in less than a half hour! If I had not had the prior experience of idiocy, and had taken this deacon's advice, I would've flooded the sanctuary of someone else's church! Mercy prevented a repeat performance of previous debacle. For once, I didn't make the same mistake twice!

#### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #10:**

**Leaders who live and lead by truth, don't lose heart.**

#### **2 Corinthians 4:2-3**

***Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.***

Translation: *“We don’t lose heart because we’re not wearing ourselves out by using deceitful tactics to lure followers.”*

I have to constantly remind myself that it’s not *my word* or *my work*. God said to Jeremiah, *“Isn’t my Word like a fire – like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”* (Jeremiah 23:29) I don’t need to try to super-charge the truth. I can let the Word of God speak for itself and do its own work.

In other words, it’s easier to not lose heart in the ministry when I’m not depending on my great ideas and trendy tactics to get the job done. It’s more achievable to persist when all I do is *“set forth the truth plainly”* and then live with integrity and honesty (which is what he meant by, *“commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”*).

When I’ve laid awake at night trying to figure out how to get people to do what I think they ought to do are the times I’m most vulnerable to losing heart – especially when they don’t do what I think they ought to do! On the other hand, I’m not so likely to lose heart when I have confidence in the sheer power of the truth of God; and when I minister that truth as best I can, whatever the result.

**I don’t need to try to super-charge  
the truth. I can let the Word of God  
speak for itself and do its own work.**

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### **Let’s be practical**

- Examine your heart for any *“shameful or deceptive ways”* of doing spiritual leadership. If you find them there, repent and renounce them. Then ask God to help you discover biblical and honest alternatives to those deceptive ways.
- Look honestly at how much time you spend searching and teaching popular ministry methods versus searching and teaching the Word of God. This might give you a clue as to how much confidence you’re putting in the sheer power of God’s Word to help others.

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### **Recovering from Preacher Talk**

By “Preacher Talk,” I’m not talking about pronouncing “God” like it’s spelled “Gaaaawwwd,” or about that practice of adding an extra breath-syllable to the end of each phrase: “God is good–huh! His Word is true–huh! Let’s do his will–huh!” Then there’s that certain preacherly tone that sounds like no one ever talks in real life. I’m not talking about pronunciation or a tone or style.

What I mean by “preacher talk” is the cliché-driven kind of Christianity that preachers often inadvertently espouse when we give our messages. It’s the happily-ever-after-Christianity where everything always works out in this life for everyone that believes and acts right. I’m talking about the formula-driven spirituality that says if we do such and such, God will most certainly do so and so. It often comes out in sermons in terms like, “God always…” and “God never…” In my own times of suffering (as well as in observing the sufferings of others), I’ve come to doubt that God is as predictable as I once thought. I don’t know that we can say with confidence that God always or never does anything in particular. Sure he never lies or sins, and he always loves. But as for things in particular, I’m not so sure that we can with confidence say that God will do this or that; or that God would never do something like that or this.

I know I sound a bit cynical, and I don’t deny picking up some cynicism along my road of difficulty. Nevertheless, my honest study of Scripture has yielded the same suspicion, if not an irritation, about trite promises made by us preachers that God will always do one thing and never another. It’s clear from the Bible that God is faithful. There’s no way to read his Word and come to any contrary conclusion. But preacher talk turns makes the terms “faithful” and “predictable” interchangeable. That is, because we can count on him it follows that we can always count on him to do things the same way he always does them. I’ve come to believe that he’s faithful in his character, but not the least bit predictable in how he chooses to express his character.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11)

C.S. Lewis (whose writings include a distinct lack of “preacher talk”) seemed to have had a similar understanding of God when he wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The Jesus character is a fierce lion named, Aslan, whose most notable characteristic was his unpredictability. He seemed capricious, almost fickle at times. He would show up sometimes and save the day, and at others he would wait until the bad became even worse. Or he would only show himself to one person and remain invisible to the rest.

One of the characters asked another about Aslan, “Is he safe?”

“No. He’s not safe, but he is good.”

It’s hard for us to live with mystery, enigma, and paradox. We seem to allow for very little wonder in our modern lives. Everything needs to be nailed down, have clear explanations, and fit a pattern. On the contrary, living a life of faith includes accepting the ambiguity of God and his ways. He’s just not that nail-downable!

Faith doesn’t mean that we have God all figured out, it means that we can live with him without having him figured out. We should expect the best from God, and yet be prepared for

the possibility of the best being something other than what we expected! He is God after all, and we're not. He doesn't work for us. It's the other way around. He doesn't always do what we want him to, and he has his reasons (I guess). He sometimes answers our prayers and even our questions. But God didn't send his Son into the world to explain stuff to us, but to save us!

This is why we shouldn't reduce our faith to clichés and trite talk about God. We shouldn't make promises to others about what God always or never does. Tell them in plain talk (as opposed to preacher talk) that he's the faithful God of mystery and wonder. His paths are "beyond tracing out," so try to keep your eye on him and follow him the best you can.

## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #11:**

**Leaders who leave the defeating of the devil to God, don't lose heart.**

### **2 Corinthians 4:4-6**

**4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

One clear cause of the difficulty of spiritual leadership is the devil himself. He blinds people to the truth, and uses a bunch of other deceptive tactics in order to keep people under his spell. His goal is to keep us all out from under the saving and healing influence of Jesus. If I'm going to avoid losing heart it's because I listen to Paul's advice in these verses to preach Christ, be a true servant, and trust God to turn on the lights for people sitting in the dark.

*"I don't rely on manipulative methods and human ingenuity to gain followers,"* Paul is saying, *"I simply preach Jesus Christ and ourselves as servants of people. I can therefore depend on God to turn on his light and open people's eyes to it."* When I refuse to preach myself (point to myself and make myself the point), but instead preach Him, He will do the soul-saving, the people-changing, the God-glorifying! He then does the delivering from *"the god of this world!"* Knowing this helps me not lose heart. If I do my part, I can trust that He'll do His! The heavy burden of defeating the devil then is not on my frail shoulders, but on His more than capable ones.

We don't have to lose heart because the responsibility for defeating the devil and for giving people revelation isn't ours. If people don't get it, we must keep doing what we're supposed to do, and leave the rest with Him! Times when I have been close to losing heart in spiritual leadership, it's been because I've forgotten these things.

One of the ways I can tell whether or not I'm leaving the miracle-working to God is how tense I am while ministering and how exhausted I am afterwards. My anxiety about, and depletion from, serving is an obvious indicator of my lapse into "playing Holy Spirit!" When I do it right and let Him "make His light shine" in people's hearts, I tend to be much more at peace and much less drained.

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## Let's be practical

- Have you been frustrated about how much influence the devil exerts on those you are trying to influence toward Christ? Ask a friend to pray with you about how you might cooperate with the victory of Jesus over the enemy, and set some captives free.
  - Are you relying on any manipulative methods of ministry, anything that you do which might fall under category of *human ingenuity versus divine infusion*? Confess it to God and to a fellow-laborer, and ask the Spirit for a fresh anointing that “breaks the yoke” of bondage.
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### LEADERSHIP LESSON #12:

**Leaders who know where the treasure is, don't lose heart.**

#### **2 Corinthians 4:7**

***7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.***

It's pretty clear by now that one of Paul's themes is doing ministry by letting God do what only God can do. But frankly, letting go and letting God is not my strongest suit. I do often become frustrated while serving when the 'ser-vees' don't get what they're supposed to get, or at the pace I think they're supposed to get it!

I heard John Madden speak of the deceased Tom Landry, who coached the Dallas Cowboys for 29 seasons (by the way, 20 of those were winning seasons!). Landry was a follower of Jesus, at least in the latter part of his career, and was a truly great man in my estimation. Madden said something like, “*We all know that if we want to do well in life, we have to not sweat the things we can't control. Tom Landry was a man who did live like that, and that's why he could coach for 29 seasons.*” If we want to serve as leaders for the long haul, we're going to have to let God be God.

Paul used two interesting Greek terms in this verse. The word “*treasure*” is the term from which we derive our word, “*thesaurus*.” A thesaurus is a treasure of synonyms, a gold mine, a treasure house of words. The other is the term for “*all surpassing (power)*.” It is the word from which we get our word, “*hyperbole*,” which means something *way beyond, to exceed the mark, to exaggerate*. In other words, we contain a *treasure of spiritual excess*. God can outstretch the weakest vessel to get His will accomplished in the earth. We are common clay jars filled with an overabundance of God's eternal riches to pour out onto other thirsty people around us!

Oswald Chambers asked, “*Who are the ones who have influenced us most? Certainly the ones who had not the remotest idea that they were influencing us.*” He calls it, “*the ministry of the unnoticed.*” Chambers also wrote, “*We have the idea that we are meant to work for*

*God along the heroic line; we are meant to do unheroic work for God in the martyr spirit. The sphere of humiliation is always the place of more satisfaction to Jesus, and it is in our power to refuse to be humiliated. To say, "No thank you, I much prefer to be on the mountaintop with God."*

**We are common clay jars  
filled with an overabundance of  
God's eternal riches  
to pour out onto other  
thirsty people around us!**

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### **Let's be practical**

- How do you view yourself? Do you see yourself as a "treasure" or as a "clay pot" holding the treasure? If you *are* the treasure, you'll have to work real hard to get people to see it! Ask the Lord if you're working so hard these days because you're trying to *be the treasure* rather than one who *carries the treasure*.
- As a "clay jar," all you have to do is be broken enough to let the treasure out! How broken are you? Watchman Nee wrote a book called, The Release of the Spirit, in which he teaches that our outer man must be broken in order for the Spirit of God dwelling in the spirit of man to be released and be poured out on others through us. If you can, read that book. If not, see if you can find that principle in Scripture and meditate on it. You might begin with Psalm 51:17.

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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #13**

#### **Leaders who suffer without succumbing don't lose heart (Part 1)**

#### **2 Corinthians 4:8-9**

**8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.**

I once shared this section with a group of pastors from Nigeria (in Tel Aviv, Israel of all places). As we talked, I realized that I had no context for the kind of suffering that they'd endured in their homeland. And this was in comparison to the relatively sheltered life I'd lived (at least to that point). I was embarrassed to realize that they could share much more about true suffering with *me* than I ever could with *them*. They spoke about the curses of witch doctors, the diseases and deaths of family members, famines, droughts, being run out of towns for their Christianity, and so on. Their sufferings were so much more parallel to that of Paul than were mine.

I don't know about you, but I want this life to be like the "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride at Disneyland. I want to float through life in my little boat, gliding through all the difficulties. The bad guys might appear as though they're going to get me, but they only get close. I want to always come safely out the other end with not a hair on my head mussed, with no real difficulty at all. But that just doesn't seem to be what God had in mind for us.

Paul, in this incredible passage, was talking about reasons spiritual leaders don't have to lose heart in their ministries. My favorite phrase in these verses is, "*but not.*" Sure - as Christian leaders we're "*hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.*" These all seem to go with the territory of living lives of service. It's the "*but not's*" that keep us from losing heart and quitting. We are "*hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down,*" BUT NOT, "*crushed, or in despair, or abandoned, or destroyed!*" Hallelujah!

It's one thing to be "*hard pressed on every side;*" but it's altogether different from being "*crushed.*" Much of the ministry for me could be described as "*hard pressed on every side.*" It seems like I often get pressure from the East, West, North, and South! Everyone has a different demand on me, and I just can't fulfill all of their hopes and expectations. I often feel hemmed in, incarcerated, overwhelmed, and trapped! But, thank God, I've never been "*crushed!*"

The word, "*crush*" or "*crushed*" is found in the Bible 71 times. Among these include Isaiah 53:5, 10; Genesis 3:15; Romans 16:20 and Matthew 21:44. These tell us that Jesus was *crushed* for us so we wouldn't have to be! Jesus *crushed* Satan's head and will do it again under our feet! We needn't ever be *crushed*. Broken, yes - *crushed*, no!

"*Perplexed*" – I've sure felt perplexity lots of times! "*What in the world is going here?! What are these people thinking? What is God thinking?! I don't see a way out of this one! I simply don't know what to do here!*"

"... *but not in despair!*" I've felt so bad at times I thought it was despair. But it wasn't! Despair is the utter gutter! Despair is being in a place in which there is no hope! Now, how could that ever be true for the Christian? No hope? That's only reserved for the person already in hell! The only place of despair is the utter and outer darkness of the Lake of Fire. But circumstance, Satan, and the sin nature have a way of teaming up to create an illusion of despair. Remember, that's all it really is - an illusion. The truth be known, on this side of hell, there's always hope, because there's always God!

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### Let's be practical

- Do you feel surrounded by circumstances beyond your control, pressing hard in on you? This is not unnatural for a spiritual leader. Remember that Jesus was crushed so you wouldn't have to be, and thank Him for it.
  - Are you "perplexed" about anything right now? Resist Satan's attempt to turn that perplexity to despair. Ask a friend to hold you accountable in avoiding hopelessness.
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## LEADERSHIP LESSON #14

### Leaders who suffer without succumbing don't lose heart (Part 2)

#### 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

**8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.**

William Barclay translates these verses:

*We are sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in; we are at our wit's end, but never at our hope's end; we are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God; we are knocked down, but not knocked out.*

I've been *persecuted* as a leader in the Church, and mostly by Christians! My persecutors are usually saints taking out their own aches and pains on me. I've heard it said, "Wounded sheep kick and bite," and I have personally been kicked and bitten by a few of God's wounded sheep!

Sometimes leaders are at an automatic disadvantage by token of their role. By association, they represent former leadership failures in people's pasts. The new pastor is persecuted in place of the former pastor (or parent or supervisor or politician) who did them wrong. Taking the heat for all those other shepherds who have wounded the sheep is one of the clear hazards of leadership.

If you're a leader, some will persecute you just because you're the most visible and most available, the one who's there. But sometimes people will hurt you because you did actually fail them. Keep in mind that just because God called you and anointed you for his service, doesn't mean you will do the job perfectly. You *will* make mistakes, some larger ones than others. You will disappoint people, and some of them will not forgive you for it! I often tell God, "*I know I'm going to make mistakes, but may my mistakes be small and seldom.*"

If your priority is to be liked and approved of by everyone, change that priority or get out of the ministry! Get used to it, you will sometimes be the object of someone's anger, the brunt of the unfinished business they have with other authority figures.

"... *but not abandoned.*" Sweet words! They say that the feeling of abandonment is the most painful human emotion and I believe it. I've felt it. And unfortunately I've felt it at times in the Church. People, even those who make promises to stick with us through the thick and thin, may indeed abandon us. But, because God is with us, we're never completely abandoned. Jesus talked about this to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion in the Upper Room: "*You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me!*" (John 16:32) Now that's "*persecuted but not abandoned!*"

## Wounded sheep kick and bite!

"*Struck down but not destroyed.*" Boy, have I ever been "*struck down*" in my attempts to serve God and his people. Between *Satan*, my own *sinfulness*, and the *sinner*s I lead, I've been knocked down plenty, but never been *knocked out!* I'm not about to be "*destroyed*" by opposition.

*"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."* (Luke 12:4-5)

*"The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* (Psalm 118:6)

### **A tough situation in the church...**

One of the most difficult experiences I've had as a spiritual leader was during a time when we were processing a serious (and illegal) sexual sin that occurred between two members of our church. The legal part was a no-brainer. We reported it immediately and let the authorities do whatever they had to do from their legal standpoint. It's always better to let the police be the police so that the pastor can pastor. In this case the pastoring part was not going to be easy. We had to decide how to minister to the families directly affected, and, at the same time, walk the church family through our emotional minefield.

One thing I eventually realized was that no one was going to be happy with whatever course we took to process it as a church. Everyone around that situation was going to be affected in a profoundly negative way. To put it another way, as one of my supervisors said to me, "The sh\*\*\* is going to hit the fan, and everyone is going to have a bunch of it on them! No one is exempt." Boy, was he ever right!

The ripple effect of these kinds of things in a spiritual community is incredible. Everyone has a reaction, everyone has an opinion, and everyone has some strong feelings about what ought to be done about it. I found myself *hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down* all in one fell swoop. Nothing I could do was going to please everyone. In fact, regardless of what I did or didn't do, I had a percentage of the church. We ended up having a public confession of the perpetrator and facilitated as much reconciliation between wounded parties as we possibly could muster. But the damage had been done, lives were ravaged, and the toll taken. Demons had won this one for their team.

Not to make it all about how *I* was personally affected by this, but since this is an essay about leadership, I'll admit that this was one of my darkest nights as a spiritual leader. The ripples became tsunami-sized waves, under which I nearly drowned. But eventually I grew from it, and the church weathered the storm as healthily as could be expected. In a nutshell, it taught me that I simply can't fix everyone – and in point of fact, I can't fix *anyone*, including myself. And though I felt "*hemmed in on every side*" I wasn't "*crushed*" by this awful thing that happened in our church.

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### **Let's be practical**

- If you've been a leader for very long it's a sure thing that you've been hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and / or struck down. Do you have some forgiving to do? Do

you have some bitterness to release? I suggest that you proceed to do that forgiving and releasing immediately, if not sooner!

- With the above in mind, have you let your bitterness turn to hardness of heart? Have you calloused your heart against God? Have you allowed yourself to doubt His goodness? Meditate on the “but not’s” of the passage, repent of your callousness, and thank God for His goodness.

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**LEADERSHIP LESSON #15 (Part 1):  
Leaders who are willing to die daily don't lose heart.**

**2 Corinthians 4:10-12**

***10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.***

Elsewhere in the letter Paul emphasizes the same theme:

*2Cor. 1:6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.*

*2Cor. 13:9 We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection.*

For the benefit of those he leads, the spiritual leader has a higher price to pay than others. He experiences a “*distress*” that others won’t necessarily experience. He endures a “*death*” that others won’t have to go through. He comes into intimate touch with his own weakness in a way that others may not. This is all so that the others will know “*comfort... life... strength*” that they might not otherwise have known.

If you know this as a leader, it will help you not lose heart. If you’re unaware of this, you’ll want to give up when you’re feeling the pains common to the spiritual leader. You won’t make a lasting leader if you’re not willing to pay a price higher than what others may have to pay. You’ll lose heart and cave in before you reach the finish line.

I’ve had many lapses of courage while serving as a leader. I’ve wrestled with myself many times and succumbed (thank God, only temporarily!) to self-pity. I’ve argued with God, “Why me? Why don’t *they* have to go through some of this stuff too?!” I’ve had to harken back to the commitment I made in the beginning. “*I’ll go where You want me to go, be what You want me to be, do whatever You want me to do - whatever the cost!*” (Boy, was I ever clueless about what I was saying!)

When we experience our own mortality and frailty (and grow from the experience) many good things go to those we’re trying to lead. Later he says, “*All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory*

of God.” (verse 15). “*All this?*” All what? All the pains and trials he’s experienced personally is for the “*benefit*” of those he leads. The lessons we’re learning (in the proverbial, “School of Hard Knocks”) are benefiting our followers in such a way as to build in them an ability to reach others. And when they reach “*more and more people,*” his praises are multiplied, and more and more “glory” is brought to Him!

This must be what Jesus meant when He said, “*Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*” (John 12:24-26) Before dying, Jesus was a *single seed*. By going to the cross, He produced *many seeds*. That is, He dies so that others may come to life and become seed producers. These seeds go into the ground and produce other seeds. If any of the seeds on this continuum decide *not to die*, the process is over! The chain of Kingdom events is nullified. When I decide not to die, no other seeds will be produced. No other people will be brought to life.

When I “lose” myself in costly service to others, life becomes possible in them! It’s similar to the heart of the parent who gives himself sacrificially for years so that his children may have a life that’s worth living. In spiritual leadership we endure a death so that life may appear in others!

Knowing the great cost of compromise on my part, I am inspired not to “lose heart” during the process of my dying. I see that it’s all part of God’s master plan to multiply life through me. I can resist losing heart if I know that my avoiding the cross will cost others their chance to have life! My dying means others will live. My going to the cross gives me resurrection power in which to live, and from which to share life with others!

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### Let’s be practical

- How is it that God is requiring your “death” lately? Can you see His hand in it? Can you believe that He is doing something in you which will bring help to others? (Keep in mind that if you don’t die, He can’t give you resurrection life to experience and to pass on to others!)
- If you need to right now, go back to that original calling you received from the Lord to be a spiritual leader (whether as an Elder, a Pastor, Evangelist...). Rehearse in your mind, and in prayer, the things God said to you, and what you said in response. Put yourself back on the altar, a living sacrifice!

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**LEADERSHIP LESSON #16 (Part 2):  
Leaders who are willing to die daily don’t lose heart.**

## 2 Corinthians 4:10-12

**10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.**

“We’re going through the worst – you’re getting in on the best!” (The Message Bible)

Dying is never fun. What comes after is more than wonderful, but the dying to get there is always a valley of shadows. A friend with whom I discussed this chapter wrote these words:

*“I’ve had my fair share of lapses of courage. And, I have fallen into the self pit(y), which just might be off the deep end of selfishness, which at times can be so dark, one can’t even see himself... I’ve held onto hurts, and felt I deserved to hold onto them, after all I was hurt! Sometimes, it just takes so long to recognize that I can be made whole again. Pray for me to give up more of self (die to my fears, hurts, and unwillingness to trust) so that I can gain more of Christ in word, attitude, mind and deed.”*

I’ve come to realize, like my friend, that if I refuse to die, I won’t have resurrection to share with others. Instead of *Resurrection*, my ministry degenerates to mere *Recollection*. Then, what I give to others is little more than a spiritual history lesson. I can talk about what happened in days of old, but have nothing contemporary to offer from the love of the living God. I can *explain* what Jesus did, but I can’t *exude* it. If I am not “always being given over to death” the friends I serve will not be given life. So, as much as I fear the death of the cross, I am aware that it has to happen in order for others to experience supernatural life from my service to them.

### Another excerpt from my Memoir...

“When Bad is Good (How Chemo is Like the Cross)”

Chemo kills bad cells and some good ones too. Of course, you are paying (in more than one way) for it to kill the *bad ones*. When it kills the good ones, that’s when it makes you sick and you lose your hair. I was thinking one day that chemo sort of acts like the cross. I’m talking about *our* cross, the one that Jesus told us to take up, carry, and die on. It kills us *and* it hurts. The cross takes away our bad life and hurts us on the way. Dying to sin and self, like Paul told us to do, can be painful. The cross hurts you and then it kills you. The goal of all of this is so that you can experience *resurrection*. You don’t get to be raised to a new life with Jesus until you die to your old one. Even Jesus wasn’t raised until he died. It’s a simple thought, but hard to do; hard because we don’t like pain and because we resist dying.

How is that like *chemo* you say? Well, chemo, hurts and kills. It hurts because, like the cross, it’s attacking sick stuff in us and killing it. When I was suffering the “ill-effects” of some very gnarly chemo therapy, I tried to remember that these symptoms were a sign that it was accomplishing something good. When I looked at myself in the mirror - a bald, skinny, very old-looking, sickly man I tried to remember that this was a good sign. The chemo was doing its thing. I was dying so that I could get raised up again with a new life.

You're standing on railroad tracks, unaware of the oncoming train behind you. You're about to be smashed when a friend sprints up to you and body-blocks you with all of his might, knocking you off the tracks before the train reaches you. He saves your life, but in the process breaks three of your ribs, gives you a concussion, and an assortment of cuts and bruises. Was it worth it? Sure, because even though you were traumatized by the "attack," it saved you, just like chemo and just like the cross. It will *hurt* you but eventually it will also *help* you. You'll become a healthier person, and you'll bear the marks that remind you what made you healthier. *"I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."* Galatians 2:20

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### Let's be practical

- We're talking here about the high cost of spiritual leadership - our death so that others can have life. Of course Jesus taught us how to die right. You might want to read one of the Gospel narratives describing His sacrificial death on the cross, and ask the Spirit to reveal to you how you might die with a similar spirit as his for the sake of others.
- Have you ever heard anyone speak of "the death of a vision"? By it people are usually referring to those times when what we'd envisioned didn't come to pass, and we need to let it die. Another way to look at it is that it's *us* who need to die to the vision we had. It's more of a grieving the loss of the vision. It's something we have to let go of – it's a death, a dying to what we believed would come to pass. Have you experienced this? Are you experiencing it now? Share your experience (past or present) with someone, and describe how you feel about it.

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### **With all this talk of losing heart, chemo therapy and church problems, here's a more light-hearted story just for the fun of it...**

Santa Cruz is a funky place. The most popular bumper sticker in town reads, "Keep Santa Cruz weird!" Though I've led churches in three cities, almost all of my funny stories come from there because it's like no place on earth.

So, our church was meeting in a former bank building. Yes, the bank vault was still intact. We used it for the nursery. Those concrete walls sure did the trick to keep those screaming babies from interrupting my sermons! Anyway, we had some characters coming to our new church in those days. One of which was a woman named, Sally (the names have been changed to protect the weird). There was really nothing about Sally that wasn't bizarre. But one particular Sunday, she won the bizarre-church-attire-award when she came dressed in a hot pink leotard. If that weren't enough, she was on roller skates! But wait, that's not all. She had a parrot on her shoulder (a live one, not like the blow-up one in the Pink Panther movie). The

bizarrest part though was when she went straight to my wife, thinking this would be some sort of friendly gesture, and placed the bird on her shoulder. Remember, we're not out in some park, we're in the middle of the high and holy experience of worshipping God in church. My wife, not particularly noted for any adoration for parrots, especially on her shoulder, kindly requested it be removed, and the service continued as weird as usual. The bird, as far as I know, didn't get saved.

## LEADERSHIP LESSON #17

### Leaders live for the glory of God and the good of people

#### 2 Corinthians 4:15

***All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God***

My main goal is to have the same goals as God. I want what matters to God to matter to me. From what I can see from the most zoomed out vantage point of the Bible, His chief goal can be summed up as, "*The glory of God and the good of people.*" I think that is what this human experiment is all about. That's what He's after - and is after us to be after. He wants everything that we do to somehow be connected to *glory* for God and *good* for people.

The first part – "*the glory of God*" – is what I call, "*The Goal of Goals.*" It's the mother of all goals. There are good goals and bad goals, and then there is the "*Goal of Goals.*" All other goals are subsidiary to this *Goal of Goals*. It is the goal from which all other good goals are derived. If God is glorified, then you can rest assured that other good things are going to happen.

Of all the other goals, the chief one is "*the good of people.*" The good of people encompasses all that is eternally good for human beings. We're not talking about what makes people *feel* good necessarily, but He wants us to *experience* good, to *be* good, and to *do* good.

When this goal (the good of people) is achieved, then the first goal (the glory of God) is also accomplished. That is, when something is good for people, it brings glory to God. When man is eternally benefited, God is glorified. And it works conversely. These two are symbiotic entities. They require and enhance each other. When God is glorified it always brings good to humans. His glory is what makes the universe sing. And when it sings, people are blessed by its song.

**There are good goals  
and bad goals, and then  
there is the "*Goal of Goals.*"**

If this is true, then it's a no-brainer that every spiritual leader must know and practice it. I propose that these two things become the filter through which we should pass all our thoughts, all our words, and all our actions. In the way you live and the way you lead others, I suggest that you continually ask yourself these two questions – "Does this bring glory to God? Does it bring good to people?"

## Another way to put it...

### *God-Centered and People-Oriented*

I think the Lord gave this to me as a sort of motto for one of our churches. This is very much akin to the “glory of God and good of people.” It’s a statement of a corporate priority. I like it because it puts first-things-first, and second-things-second, with everything else following.

Notice that it’s “*God-Centered and People-Oriented.*” You don’t want those transposed into “God-oriented and people-centered.” A lot of churches are like that. They are simply *oriented* around God but *centered* on people. In other words, the needs and desires of people trump the centrality of God. But God must be always and forever be our *center*.

And then, though we shouldn’t put people at the center, we must be people-oriented. That is, we can’t forget that the Church is people. It’s not about programs, or policies. The church isn’t budgets, bureaucracies, or buildings. While we must be centered on God, we must also be oriented to people – helping each one to find their center in Him.

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## Let’s be practical

- When Paul said, “All this is for your benefit” and “for the glory of God” he was referring to his sufferings. He was saying that he was willing to pay any price so that God’s goals can be achieved. What are you suffering right now that would be easier to endure if you reminded yourself that it is *for the glory of God*?
- How might people be benefitted by your endurance of the difficulties in your life?

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## LEADERSHIP LESSON #18:

**Leaders who give themselves to constant renewal don’t lose heart.**

### **2 Corinthians 4:16**

***Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.***

During the Bone Marrow Transplant I wasn’t able to go into public because of my vulnerability to infection. I couldn’t go to church gatherings and worship with others, so some of my friends came to me to worship with me. David was a passionate Jesus follower at the ripe old age of 18. He leads worship in his church and came over a few times with his guitar and we worshipped God together. From the first note he strummed I was on emotional overload. I didn’t know that I had so much fluid that could run out of my eyes and nose. I wept until I could weep no more. Call it the chemo, call it grief, call it deliverance, call it whatever you

like. But I was down for the count as they say, unable to contain the joy for my victories and the sadness for my losses. In this case, I was among close friends and could let it all hang out.

Let me assure you that though this might sound more like a psychotic break than a positive spiritual experience, it helps me every time I encounter God in this way. I can't make it happen, and wouldn't try even if I could. It's simply God being God, showing up in his way in his time, and doing what he wants to do at the time. He'll access whichever of my parts (emotional, physical, spiritual) that he wants at whatever depths he wants. I like it when he does (usually).

Paul repeats his theme: *"Therefore we do not lose heart."* All he's said so far in this chapter has been to tell us how he didn't lose heart in the midst of a difficult and pain-filled ministry. He concludes that theme now in the final statements of the chapter with some key insights.

As a leader, I've felt myself at times *"wasting away outwardly."* It takes its toll on you caring for the souls of others. It's especially tough when they don't seem to care for their own souls, or care very much about your caring! What I have to do when being outwardly debilitated is make sure that I am *"being renewed inwardly day by day."*

O God, give us all renewal! We need to be made new again on the inside!

- He RENEWS *"our youth like the eagle's"* (Psalm 103:5).
- If we'll wait on Him, He'll RENEW *"our strength like the eagle's"* (Isaiah 40:31).
- We must be RENEWED *"in the spirit of our minds"* (Ephesians 4:23).
- We're "transformed" (instead of conformed to the world) by the RENEWING *"of our minds"* (Romans 12:2).

He speaks of it in the passive voice as a "being renewed," as though it's something that happens *to* us, rather than something done *by* us. It's not something *I* do, but something *God* does, as I make myself available to His renewing work in me! I do have something to do with it. I often have to want it, make the time for it, and take a posture to receive it. But the rest is up to God to give it.

While there's always been a lot of talk about "Renewal in the Church," the ones most in need of it are those who are leading the Church! We need Him to make *new* what has been made to feel and look *old* by the hardships of serving!

#### **An excerpt from my Memoir...**

During one of my darkest hours it became clear to me that I was in need of spiritual refreshment. Nine times out of ten, when I need a touch from God I seek a place of solitude rather than a place where a bunch of people are. My favorite way to connect with God is on an empty beach or a mountain path. But this time I felt the need to be with people, and especially people who are contending for a consistent contact with the special presence of God. I'd heard of a church that seemed to fit that criterion, so I made arrangements and drove up there.

The messages that I heard there were inspiring, and the times when people laid hands on me to pray were encouraging. But it was the times of worship in which I consistently and totally broke down with profuse tears. During one of those letting-it-all-hang-out worship times I had a vision.

**I journaled the vision like this:**

*I went into a gold mine that eventually caved in and cut me off from the entrance. It's dark and terrifying and I wonder if anyone is coming to save me. Somehow I see Jesus at the entrance start hurling away boulders (ones way too big for me to lift). As he does, foul looking demons (they brought back the 'Golum' image from Lord of the Rings) are crushed under them. He either rolls the boulders or throws them like they're weightless, and the spirits are immediately destroyed when they land on them. He picks some of the demons from the stones of the cave-in and tosses them back to be crushed under the boulders. From inside the cave I can't actually see all of this going on, but I see myself in the sheer darkness stand up to worship Jesus, believing he is worthy regardless of what he does or doesn't do for me. I think about trying to dig myself out, but there really is no point. It's too daunting and too dark and the obstacles way too heavy for me to lift. So I wait in worship. And then I see Jesus begin to slowly pump water along the ground through the boulders. I couldn't see the water so much for the dark, but I could feel it, and when I bent to taste it, it refreshed me – spirit, soul and body.*

It was clear to me that he was (and is) saying to me through the vision that though I am in a dark and terrifying place, Jesus is near; and he is furiously, yet effortlessly smashing my enemies as he digs through the daunting rubble of my caved-in life. As I trust him enough to love and praise him while in my darkest of circumstances, he quietly pours his Spirit through the stony obstacles for my renewal and refreshment. Thank you, Lord!

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**Let's be practical**

- What types of things tend to “renew” you? Be specific. Plan to do some of these things this week.
- David also spoke of renewal, “*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*” (Psalm 51:10). Has leadership adversely affected your “steadfastness?” Due to the outward man wasting away, have you allowed your inward man to be less than steadfast? If so, pray David’s repentance prayer today. Use Psalm 51 as a catalyst to your prayer.

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**LEADERSHIP LESSON #19:**

**Leaders who focus on the invisible and eternal don't lose heart.**

## **2 Corinthians 4:17-18**

***For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.***

Paul shows us here how we may view our “troubles” and trials as leaders in such a way as to actually bring us encouragement, as opposed to discouragement. He says several things here about these “troubles.” He reminds us that they’re “light” in comparison to glory and “momentary” in contrast to eternity. That is, in contrast to God’s glory and eternity, our troubles are paltry. When I compare what I’m going through now with what I know about the future in heaven, I’m compelled not to give up. I’m inspired to *“not be weary in well doing for in due season we shall reap if we faint not (not lose heart)!”*

Another thing he tells us about these troubles is that they are being used by God to “achieve” something for us. These difficulties are at work. Actually, *God* is at work in us through the troubles to give us more and more a share in His glory in the eternal state!

I don’t have to lose heart in the ministry because I know that the troubles I’m going through now are actually shaping me, preparing me, making me more and more fit to experience and enjoy our God in the glorified state. While at times my spiritual leadership troubles seem excruciatingly heavy, they’re really “light.” What, in actuality, is heavy, is the glory of God that I’ll experience in heaven! The Old Testament word for “glory” is “*chabod*,” which denotes *weight* - something substantial or heavy. Paul is referring to this when he compares our “*light troubles*” with the “*weight of glory*.”

I can keep from losing heart in the ministry by refusing to fix my eyes on the visible and temporary. Instead I must gaze (in contrast to “glance”) on that which is invisible and eternal. I have to put my focus on what is eternally substantial instead of what is temporary and fleeting. Because, what seems so heavy to me now will be infinitesimally light by comparison to the eternal weight of God’s glory!

### **Another excerpt from my Memoir...**

I entitled it: “If You’re Claustrophobic, Don’t Read This”

The doctors determined that the cancer had pretty much eaten away one of the vertebrae in my neck, and before repairing it surgically, they wanted to try radiation on it. They prescribed the very exacting beam kind of radiation, and in order to do that they would have to make me entirely immobile for the 20 treatments.

They put this heated, partially-melted plastic mask over my face to make a perfect contour. On the perimeter of the mask are holes through which bolts go to hold the mask down securely on the radiation table. This is all fine until you discover that it’s going to be secure there *with your face in it!* And usually where your face goes, so goes the rest of you. That is, they laid me on the table, bolted me down by the mask (it kind of looks like a fencing mask) and held me there while the radiation was doing its work. This happened everyday for about 20 days. Fortunately, each one lasted no more than about 5 minutes. But if you’re the least bit claustrophobic this will launch you running naked in the street screaming! I have at least two

friends who when I described this process and showed them the mask, they were mentally running for the door (they kept their clothes on though). But for the grace of God...

This is one of those times when you want to think happy thoughts and keep out the unhappy ones. Unhappy thoughts in this case would include such things as, "*I wonder where all the people went?* (They all scurry around the corner somewhere. I never could figure that out. What's good for me is bad for them? They get a concrete wall between them and the radiation and all I get is the little lead shield for my private parts!) *Will they go on break and forget I'm here? What happens in the event of an earthquake?*" Happy thoughts might include stuff like, "*I gotta get photos of this to show my friends (which I did)! I am going to ask them if I can take this mask home after the treatments are all done* (I did that too, and I display it in my room as a badge of honor). *I'm not really bolted to this table getting radiation shot into my neck. I'm laying on a secluded beach in Hawaii listening to the waves and feeling the warmth of the sun on my face.*" Happy thoughts are always better than unhappy ones.

Even better than the happy-thought-method of coping with anxiety and fear is meditating on the Bible. The passage that I was memorizing during these treatments was 2 Corinthians 4. It's pretty much all about how not to *lose heart*, how to endure, how to persevere in the midst of lots of bad things happening around you and to you. Well, I think it would be accurate to say that a lot of bad things have happened to me in the last couple of years! While the entire chapter ministers to me in a big way, the final three verses were particularly helpful during the claustrophobic radiation treatments.

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Notice the contrasts:

*Outwardly vs Inwardly...*

Never have I seen so clearly the distinction between the *outside* and the *inside* of me. My outside has always been pretty much intact, strong, and healthy. Since cancer invaded, weakness and frailty have been more the norm. And I can't lie to you; my outward condition has severely affected my inward state. Discouragement, depression, and despair have been frequent visitors. But for the most part, God's peace and presence have permeated my inside part. At the same time that I see my body deteriorating, sometimes I can feel my spirit soaring.

*Wasting away vs Renewed day by day...*

One part of us is decreasing and the other increasing, one getting worse and the other getting better. Go figure. Only God could grow something good in bad soil. During chemo I could see myself in the mirror wasting away. I wondered who that bald, skinny guy was. On the other hand, daily renewal is not so visible to the eye. It's something God does on the inside, sometimes even without our participation. I'm sure the spiritual disciplines are a factor in daily renewal, but I suspect it sometimes happens by grace entirely apart from our prayers, Bible reading, and worship.

*Light and momentary troubles vs An eternal glory that far outweighs them all...*

Being candid, I've had a tough time seeing my recent troubles as "light and momentary." To me they seem pretty heavy and long lasting. This is definitely one of those things that I have to take by faith, that there exists a place that is very different than this place. It goes on

forever and it is even more substantial than this place. Everything in me, except for the faith muscle, says that this world is all there is. But I am totally convinced that there is “an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

*What is seen is temporary vs What is unseen is eternal...*

Of course, my desire is that “temporary” means something that can be measured in hours, days, or months. I’d love to be rid of this cancer (which is “seen”) as soon as possible. But if I’m not, then I’m really looking forward to the next life (the eternal and unseen) for my healing.

*“We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen”* I have to learn how to “fix my eyes” on Jesus, which is more of a gaze than a glance. There seems to be some effort involved here, since my eyes are prone to wander. I want to “fix” them on what is worthy of being fixed to. My afflictions don’t in themselves “*achieve for me an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*” It’s Jesus who does that, so I’ve got to look at Him! If somehow I don’t see him, I’ll waste my sorrows.

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## Let’s be practical

- Think about times when it feels you’re about to lose heart as a leader (maybe now is one of those times). You’ll have to admit that one chief cause of those feelings is your focus on the visible, the temporary, the earthly. Take a moment now and meditate on the eternal state, eternal values, the invisible hand of God orchestrating earthly events for His ultimate glory and your ultimate good!
- Do you have a “trouble” right now which seems for all the world as big as Mt. Everest? Try to picture that trial (I’d say, “visualize” if you wouldn’t think I was being “New Agey”) in contrast to the real hugeness of God and His glory. In other words, put it in proper perspective.

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Thus concludes the rich fourth chapter which teaches us lesson after lesson on how not to “lose heart” while serving as spiritual leaders. Before moving on to the next chapter, if your own heart is waning right now, please find someone, share your struggle with them (along with the things you’ve gleaned from 2 Corinthians 4). If you’re not, then find someone whose heart is waning, and share with them what you’re learning.

**LEADERSHIP LESSON #20:**  
**Leaders are faithful because of a fear of the Lord.**

### **2 Corinthians 5:11**

**Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.**

**What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.**

Since Paul concluded Chapter 4 with talking about fixing his eyes on the eternal, he went on to write about our eternal home in heaven in Chapter 5. This led him to mention in verse 10

the *Judgment Seat of Christ* where the rewards for all Christians will be distributed: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”* It’s this prospect which inspires us to *“fear of the Lord,”* which, in turn, inspires us to *“persuade men”* to serve Him. As I understand it, here’s Paul’s the stream of thought:

- We have to steady our thoughts on the eternal because...
- We have a home in that eternal place. And as we enter that eternal place...
- We’ll be evaluated at the Judgment Seat for how we did here on earth, and so...
- We fear the “Evaluator” and live to persuade others to prepare them for His evaluation.

While all Christians need this fear and must strive to persuade others to come to Christ, this is especially pertinent to us as leaders in the Church, whose lives are devoted to this task. To the Colossians Paul writes about this devotion, *“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”* (Colossians 1:28-29)

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*

There are two places of judgment at which people are evaluated by God. There is the “Great White Throne” (Revelation 20) before which every rejector of Christ will stand and be proven worthy of eternal punishment. Our job is “proclaim” the Good News to everyone we can so that they can avoid this judgment altogether by receiving salvation and becoming a forgiven follower of Jesus. The choice is theirs, but the job is ours to let them know about their choice. The other place of judgment is the “Judgment Seat of Christ” (1 Corinthians 3) at which every believer will stand in order to be evaluated for how they lived their lives for Him while on earth. Our responsibility with our fellow believers is to, *“admonish and teach them”* so that we may, *“present them (to God) perfect in Christ”* at that place of evaluation. With the pre-saved person, our responsibility is to snatch them from *the fire of hell*. Once that is done, we labor with God’s energy to prepare them for *the fire of heaven* (so to speak) which will “test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Corinthians 3:13). We want, with all our hearts, for them to avoid the *eternal fire* and be prepared for the *evaluative fire*. And we labor with all the energy that he mightily inspires within us to that end!

In other words, spiritual leaders labor... to get people saved (so they can get to heaven)... to get them to behave like saved people (so their rewards in heaven will be in tact)... and to get them to get others saved (so they – *the others* – can go to heaven too)!

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### Let’s be practical

- Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, which describes the “Judgment Seat of Christ.” Think about those you lead. How are you preparing them for this experience?
- In light of 1 Corinthians 3, how do you fare so far in your own life and ministry? Are you building with “wood, hay, and stubble” or with “gold, silver, and precious stones?” Ask the Lord to give you a *“performance review”* today. (Remember the performance

reviews you got in high school in the middle of the semester where the teacher was letting you know how you were doing in her class so that you could shore up any areas before it was too late? Let the Lord give you one of those today.)

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## **LEADERSHIP LESSON #21:**

### **Leaders view people through their potential in Christ.**

#### **2 Corinthians 5:16-17**

**And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has gone, the new has come!"**

Many years ago we had a woman in our church family named "Tess." She was a challenge to pastor (to say the very least!). Tess had no small "personality disorder," and though sincere in her faith, she was socially challenged. Her "disorder" frankly gave me a headache as I tried to clean up one relationship mess after another, which seemed to follow her everywhere she went. I found myself resenting her and wishing she'd suddenly get a calling to the church down the street.

One day as I was complaining to the Lord about having to deal with yet another "Tess-mess," the Holy Spirit urged me to take a different mental posture toward her. He challenged me to begin viewing her in light of her future glorified state in heaven! He wanted me to think of her in her future perfected and flawless condition, and then work at helping her to make progress toward that end.

As I practiced this, I began to experience a new love and patience for Tess that seemed impossible before. She was no longer a problematic parishioner, but rather a person on her way to ultimate perfection. I found myself happy (at least *happier*) about the privilege of partnering with God in the perfecting of one of his beloved saints!

As a spiritual leader, how I view the people with whom I have influence is key. I can't afford to view others "*from a worldly point of view.*" Paul described this worldly point of view a few verses earlier when he referred to those who "*take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart*" (verse 12). He then confesses that it was in this way he once viewed Jesus. That is, he looked at the Lord from an earthly perspective, from the vantage point of merely what he could see with his natural eyes and his earthly reasoning. When people look at Christ that way they have no special respect for him, because, from the outside, he "*had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him*" (Isaiah 53:2). But once we saw him from the vantage point of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit helping us to see his intrinsic worthiness, we instantly respected him for Who he is.

That same process needs to happen between us and our brothers and sisters. We have to see them from that same vantage point of the spirit, as "*new creatures in Christ.*" Spiritual leaders in particular have to take on this spiritual perspective with a view to the eternal

perfection of those we lead. We need to see them as those for whom Christ died, and in whom Christ is living and laboring for their maturity. They not only have an eternal destiny, but an eternal power to fulfill it! The people I care for have every heavenly resource that they need in Christ to be all that they can be! *“The old has gone and the new has come!”*

After that, when I saw Tess coming, instead of running the other way, I walked toward her with an aspiration of finding ways to partner with God in the work of art he was in the process of finishing.

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### Let's be practical

- I can tell if I'm viewing people from a *“worldly point of view”* by the attitudes I exhibit when I observe them living below their potential. How's your attitude about the failures of those you lead (see Romans 14:4)? Have a conversation with the Lord about it now.
- Think about one such person who has, let's say, many miles to go in their spiritual maturation, and tend to make your discipling role in their life more difficult than you'd hoped. Examine your attitude toward them, and determine whether your perspective is spiritual or carnal. Repent, if need be.

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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #22:** **Leaders are “surgeon's assistants.”**

#### **2 Corinthians 6:1**

***As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.***

I love his terminology for leaders: “God's fellow workers.” He used it again in his first letter to the Corinthians along with some other descriptive terms for those who lead:

*“For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. ...What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe --as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ...So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.”* (1 Corinthians 3:5, 9; 4:1).

I've labeled these passages in the margin of my Bible: “What Leaders Look Like.”

As *“God's fellow worker,”* I often pray, “Lord, show me how I can partner with You, as You further your purposes in this person.” I have to remember that God doesn't really *need* me to help Him help people, but He has chosen to *include* me in the process. I see myself as an *“Assistant to the Master Surgeon.”* I don't do surgeries; I merely take orders from Him while *He* does them! I'm there to hand Him whatever scalpels, stitches or sponges that He requires during His surgeries on people's souls.

Thinking of my role like this helps me in two ways. First, it takes the pressure off of me to have to fix people or be their personal spiritual surgeon. I'm not the surgeon. I usually don't

have a clue what someone's problem is, let alone the cure for it. There's only one *Spiritual Surgeon*, and it's certainly not me!

On the other hand, it does make me responsible to be available to the Lord and to people. I may not be the Master Surgeon, but the Master has chosen to include me as one of His many "*fellow workers*," and He's counting on me to do *my job* alongside Him as He does His job!

*"If you don't want to be on the news tonight, don't let me wake up during the surgery!"* That's what I told the anesthesiologist before the neurosurgeon cut me open to install titanium rods, plates and screws in my spine. I thought, besides the surgeon himself, the guy whose job it is to keep me unconscious was the most important. I wasn't nearly as afraid of dying on the table as I was of waking up on the table with the job only half done! While the surgeon is the main guy, he needs his assistants in order to successfully repair people.

**There's only one *Spiritual Surgeon*,  
and it's certainly not me!**

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### Let's be practical

- There's something humbling and something inspiring about seeing yourself as an assistant to the Master Surgeon. The humbling part is in realizing that *we* don't really help people. We merely partner with God as *He* helps them. Is there a chance that you have forgotten (or never learned) this? Ask the Lord if there's someone under your spiritual influence with whom you're trying to do the work of the Surgeon instead of His assistant.
- The inspiring part is realizing that God does include us, wants to use us, is counting on us to partner with Him. Are you feeling a bit "useless" lately? Maybe you need to design a mock business card with this title following your name, "GOD'S FELLOW WORKER." Ask Him if there's someone on whom He's about to do surgery, and he requires your assistance.

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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #23: Leaders are not quitters**

#### **2 Corinthians 6:3-10**

***We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with***

***weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.***

Paul was very reluctant throughout the letter to “commend himself.” Yet he succumbed, and did so lest his apostolic authority become undermined and the truth he preached be doubted. He thus forced himself to list evidences of his servanthood to God. From this list we get an idea of what Paul considered servant leadership to look like. While you may not have experienced some of Paul’s sufferings, the spirit of the servant is unmistakably clear. Servant leaders endure. They have troubles, hardships and distresses. They’re willing to be imprisoned and be beaten. They’re not afraid of hard work, sleepless nights or hunger. They live purely, with understanding, patience and kindness. They depend on the Holy Spirit to empower them to love people, be honest with people, and do spiritual battle for them. They endure disapproval and misunderstandings. While suffering, they rejoice. While being deprived, they focus on the needs of others.

We might note at least three categories of servant-leader sufferings in these verses. First, Paul says he’s enduring through **pain** (...*troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger...*). While your sufferings may not be the same as his, rest assured, you will suffer at times as a servant-leader.

Second, he endures in his own personal **purity** (...*in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left...*). There’s a certain suffering for purity, for goodness. Living like Jesus in this contrary world is no picnic. You go against the grain when you choose to follow Him. And when you do, you will most definitely get slivers!

And third, he endures **people** (...*through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything...*) In addition to pain and purity, as a spiritual leader you’ll have to endure people – along with their sins and silliness. Even though you are “genuine” (hopefully), you’ll be accused of being an “imposter.” Nevertheless, even when you’re “sorrowful,” you’ll have the opportunity to “rejoice,” because it was to this that Jesus called you. You’ll find it a privilege to suffer for His sake as you point people (many of whom aren’t entirely excited about being pointed) toward Christ!

I made a commitment to God to do no more “whining and pining.” That is, no more whining about what I go through in ministry. And no more pining away about wanting something that I don’t have, or can’t do, in ministry. He’s reminded me that I’m not called to *success*, but to *service*. If I can serve successfully, I’m stoked! And when you think of it, what is “*successful servanthood*?” It has to be that we’re *servicing faithfully* - right?!

*'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'* " Luke 17:7-10

First and foremost I have to remember that I'm a servant of God. Nothing more - nothing less. A servant has no rights, just responsibilities. When my focus is on what I think I *deserve*, I'm not operating in the servant's attitude. Servants don't expect the world (or the church) to revolve around them. So, when it doesn't, they're not surprised!

When I'm a servant, the focus is not on *me* (the servant), but on *Him* (the One served). A servant's life is not usually an easy one. I'll have to endure a lot and resist self-pity. Someone pointed out (Jesus, I think) that the Christian life is supposed to *kill you!* Your only chance of being a *successful servant* of God is to die to what you tend to want. When you're willing to do that, you can experience resurrection power to do what God wants. The antidote for self pity? Death!

We say "*we are unworthy*" servants, so that someday He may say, "*well done thou good and faithful servant!*"

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### Let's be practical

- I don't know about you, but I tend toward getting soft in my service to God and people. Look at this list of sufferings and be honest with yourself about your willingness to experience any, or all, of these.
- Paul's phrase in verse 10, "*sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*" goes along with what he says in the next chapter, "*in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds*" (7:4). Amazing isn't it? The spiritual leader can be "sorrowful" and yet "rejoicing." He may have "troubles" at the same time he has boundless "joy!" Ask God to show you the keys to that kind of joy in your life.

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#### A piece of a chapter from my Memoir:

*"Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."* Hebrews 12:13

Help me embrace this season of suffering, Lord. Help me get better, go deeper, become more like you. Help me see this as an opportunity to let you do whatever it is that you want to do in me. My temptation and tendency is to close up, protect myself, defend myself - instead of open up (like soil) to your seed. Empower me, crucify me, raise me, heal me. Help me take the eternal view, grasp the spiritual lesson, get the bigger picture. If I can't see the picture, help me know there is a picture that you're painting with me in it. May I be a graceful sufferer, and not difficult for you and others to be around. Wherever in the suffering there is a cross, help me not shirk it. Give me grace to die on it. Give me faith to wait for the resurrection to follow – however delayed it might be. I think of the traffic signs that say, "Expect Delays." I'm living in *a day of delays*. I'm learning to expect them.

One of the reasons to “suffer well” is that others will get better by watching us. We all have someone watching. Those watching are those “lamed” by life. They’re our friends and family who we don’t want to be “disabled but rather healed.” The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: *“Take a new grip with your tired hands, stand firm on your shaky legs, and mark out a straight smooth path for your feet so that those who follow you, though weak and lame will not fall and hurt themselves, but become strong.”*... The Message Bible says, *“Clear the path for long distance runners so that no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it!”*

He’s talking about the people right behind us in the race. They’re watching where we step and they put their feet where we do, trusting that we know what the heck we’re doing! If we handle our life pains with whining and self-pity, to their own loss so will they. And we will have led them to that loss. On the other hand, if we endure the pain, and embrace God’s lessons, then they will follow our example and be *healed* rather than *disabled*.

My unofficial paraphrase:

*OK so you’re going through hard times, being disciplined by God. Pick yourself up the best you can and don’t let it get you down, so those who are watching won’t get down and get worse themselves. They’re already lamed by life, don’t disable them further. Your goal in your suffering is to get better in such a way that they will also improve from simply watching you.*

#### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #24:**

**Leaders maintain vulnerable and supple hearts toward others, even when it hurts.**

**2 Corinthians 6:11-13; 7:2-3; 12:15-16**

***We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. 13 As a fair exchange --I speak as to my children --open wide your hearts also.***

***Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you.***

***So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? 16 Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery!***

In these three passages Paul affirms his stubborn love for those he leads. He pleads with them to reciprocate that love to him. Then he confesses that whether or not they do reciprocate, he’s committed to keep on loving them. It’s one thing to love someone when they love you back. It’s quite another to love and serve them when they act toward you anyway but loving!

Did you notice the intimate and personal terminology Paul uses? *“We opened our hearts to you... We are not withholding our affection from you... I speak as to my children... Make room for us in your hearts... You have such a place in our hearts that we would live and die with you... If I love you more, will you love me less?”* I can’t imagine being more vulnerable, more tender, more transparent than this!

Tyler (a pastor friend of mine) was being mercilessly criticized by a woman in the congregation for his preaching. I guess she didn’t think he measured up to her standard in some way. As her ruthless tirade ensued, Tyler got on his knees before his accuser, and humbly requested her prayers that he would become a better communicator of God’s Word! Oswald Chambers said, *“One of greatest proofs that you are drawing on the grace of God is that you can be humiliated without manifesting the slightest trace of anything but His grace in you... Wine comes only from crushed grapes... You cannot be poured-out wine if you remain a whole grape; you cannot be broken bread if you remain whole grain. Grapes have to be crushed, and grain has to be ground; then the sweetness of the life comes out to the glory of God.”*

I think the most painful part of spiritual leadership is when I have opened my heart to people and been frighteningly vulnerable, only to have them later reject me personally or the help I was offering them. Nothing has broken my heart more readily than this. Fortunately, *“He is close to the broken hearted,”* and I have, at times such as these, sensed an unparalleled closeness with Him.

While you’ll never relish this kind of hurt, if you’re going to serve God and people, you can’t entirely avoid it. If you’re going to lead as a servant, you must do so with your “heart open.” And if you choose to do so, there will be times when your heart gets hurt. The ministry can be an emotionally hazardous occupation. But He’s there to heal all wounds.

The question you have to ask yourself is, “Is it worth it to be so open to people?” Before answering that, note what Paul says, *“If I love you more, will you love me less?”* Their answer to that really had no bearing on how he would continue to relate to them. His next words were, *“Be that as it may.”* That is, *“Regardless of how you choose to treat me, I will always love you!”*

Lord, help me to keep my heart open and supple even toward those who close up their hearts toward me! If they withhold their affection from me, strengthen me to resist following suit! Help me to keep making room in my heart for those who won’t make room in theirs for me! I’m tempted to protect my battered heart by avoiding intimacy with others. I do (usually) believe in the old saying, “It’s better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” As leaders, we can’t afford to roll up in a self-protecting ball of self-pity. We can’t lead if our heart has a “Closed” sign on it. Love is a choice, so I have to choose to love. Keep in mind that whether or not people love you back, God always does!

**Help me to keep making room  
in my heart for those who  
won’t make room in theirs for me!**

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## Let's be practical

- Spiritual leadership is a great place to get your heart stepped on! As I said, I think this is the most painful part of the job. Are you dealing with any past or present hurts from putting your heart out there and having it abused? Go to the most vulnerable, and yet, the most rejected Man in history, and have a talk. Remember, He's "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."
- Are you tempted, as I often am, to protect your smashed heart by avoiding intimacy with others? Ask a friend to pray with you for healing on the inside of you. Pray that you'll have the ability to forgive those who have hurt you in the past and those who may hurt you in the future. Ask God for courage to be vulnerable again to those around you so that you can influence them toward the same mindset of humility.

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**LEADERSHIP LESSON #25:**  
**Leaders must "hurt" people at times in order to help them.**

### **2 Corinthians 7:8-10**

***Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it --I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while-- yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.***

Surgeons always hurt people in the process of helping them. Truth hurts when you're living a lie! When we need to repent, it hurts to hear it, and it usually hurts to do it! I know for me it's uncomfortable to hear that I need to change, to admit that I need to change, and to do the changing! I appreciate leaders who were willing to cause me some hurt to point out the changes I needed to make and I appreciate that it only hurt "for a little while."

As a leader, I have to be willing to upset people sometimes. If they're in need of repenting, they're going to have to be convicted of their sin. If they're going to get convicted, they're probably going to have to get upset first – at themselves for what they're doing wrong and sometimes at me for pointing it out to them. Evil King Ahab referred to Elijah as the one who "troubles Israel" when he was the one who was actually to blame for the trouble in his country. But Elijah didn't let his king's blame-shifting attitude deter him from confronting him.

We have to be willing to pay the price of a temporary – and maybe even permanent – loss of people's approval, appreciation, and affection, in order to challenge them to live better lives. We have to be ready to jeopardize our relationship with them for the higher goal of improving their relationship with God. Sometimes it takes "hurting them" temporarily in order to help them eternally.

There's a world of difference between "hurting" someone and "harming" them. Good leaders

may *hurt* people (who need to be pierced by the truth), but they won't *harm* them (or damage them in any way). Harm is where their overall condition worsens; when they're worse off from having us "minister" to them! It's never our goal to injure people. But like surgeons (or his assistants) we are willing to hurt them in order to help them.

*Proverbs 27:5-6 Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.*

*Proverbs 28:23 He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.*

### ***I did it right at least once...***

I'm often on one extreme or the other. I'm either too harsh or too tender when I have to "reprove, rebuke, or exhort" people in the church. One time, by God's grace, I did it right when I had to let a staff member go. He had not been performing his ministry sufficiently, and after many months of trying to find a way to help him make some improvements, I had to help him see that it was time for him to look for gainful employment elsewhere (I hate the word, "firing"). It was difficult, mostly because he was my close friend as well as ministry partner. We had worked together for over five years, and I loved him as a brother. I knew I had to let him go for the sake of the church, but for his sake I wanted to do it in such a way that he wasn't crushed. To cut to the chase, I think God must've helped me, because afterward he said, "You have a way of confronting people so that they are able to walk away feeling better about themselves than before you confronted them."

Not only did we stay friends afterward, but he and his family remained in the church and served as avid volunteers. I'm thankful to God for that.

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### **Let's be practical**

- Have you "hurt" people with the truth, weathered their initial reaction, seen them turn around, and be ultimately helped? Or, are you afraid of their reaction so much that you refuse to tell them the painful truth? Take a look at your own heart. Do you want people to like you, or do you want them to get better? Ask a friend to pray for you for a more loving boldness.
  - I'm sure, as a leader that you don't live to harm people. Keep in mind that there are at least two ways you can do that. First, you can refuse them the spiritual medicine that would help them get better. Second, you can harm them by speaking the truth without love! So, resolve to speak the truth, and speak it in a spirit of love. Converse with the Lord about this delicate balance right now.
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## LEADERSHIP LESSON #26:

Leaders often catch people doing things right.

2 Corinthians 7:4, 13-16

*I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds. By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.*

You can't help but see here how Paul loved his friends in Corinth. He'd been with them more than a year and a half. He was well acquainted with their strengths and weaknesses (it seems they had a lot of the latter!). But he expresses how "*proud*" he is of them, he "*boasts*" about them regularly, he has great "*affection*" for them, and he very "*encouraged*" about their progress. There is a healthy sense of pride that a leader must have in those he leads. And a healthy leader knows just how to express that pride in order to inspire greater health in them.

The wise leader knows not only how to catch his people doing something *wrong* and bring correction to them (see the previous lesson). He also knows how to catch them doing something *right* and commend them for it. He can express his displeasure without fear, and he can express his pleasure without hesitation. If I really love those charged to my care, I'll be bold to rebuke them when needed, *and* quick to embrace them when appropriate.

Because people often experience self doubts and lack confidence in themselves as Christians, it's important for the spiritual leader to express his "*confidence*" in them (vv. 4, 16). A vote of confidence from a respected leader goes a long way to encourage the tentative disciple to begin living up to his potential again. As leaders, we must both uproot and plant, tear down and build up (Jeremiah 1:10).

### **Sometimes all it takes is a simple note...**

Peter pulled a small piece of paper out of his Bible and said to me, "Take a look at this." It was a simple note of praise that I had written to him at least 10 years before while we were on a short-term missions trip together. Frankly, I didn't even remember writing it, but to him it was memorable. In the note I was commending my young protégé for his efforts on the trip. Peter went on to be a passionate and gifted long-term missionary. He told me that he had kept the note for two reasons. One was that it had meant a lot to him to have me build him up in such a way. The other reason was that he had shown it to another of my young disciples, who told him something like, "You should keep that. Barney doesn't do that very often."

## Let's be practical

- People who have worked with me have said I have the “proof-reader’s curse.” When I glance at something someone else has written or typed, I immediately see all the typos and errors. That may be a bit overstated, but it’s true that we leaders may be better at finding mistakes than noticing jobs well done. Ask someone that you lead how they feel about how you rate at catching them doing things right.
- Even though Paul knew what he knew about them, he told the Corinthians, “I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.” That must have been a tremendous encouragement for them to hear. This week, find someone you are leading, and tell them how proud of them you are and why.

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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #27: Leaders lead in the “grace of giving.”**

#### **2 Corinthians 8:7, 21**

***But just as you excel in everything --in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us --see that you also excel in this grace of giving.....For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.***

Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians is all about the “grace of giving.” Paul is reminding, rebuking, instructing them about giving financially to the needy. They had made overtures before about participating in an offering for the poor. He’s writing to encourage them to begin. These chapters have the most complete statement regarding generous and biblical giving in the entire Bible. We won’t slow down to look at every verse or principle. What I will point out though, is that what we have in these chapters teaches us that spiritual leadership requires leading people in regard to their material wealth. Christian leaders must model generous giving and invite others to participate in it.

Begin talking to people about their money and watch out! This is such a touchy subject today. But Paul models for us an unashamed approach to living and giving generously. He challenges his people to obey God in every area of life, which includes the responsible and generous use of finances.

By way of summary, note the ways Paul addresses this subject in these two chapters:

#### **He’s tactful...**

*I am not commanding you... And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter...* (8:8, 10) We can’t command people to give, but we can and must exhort and advise them to give scripturally. We must disciple them in this area for their own good, and not for our own benefit.

Peter says, *“Be shepherds of God’s flock... not greedy for money...”* (1 Peter 5:1-2). If you have a conflict of interest in teaching people to give, then get your heart right, but don’t fail to give them the *“whole counsel of God”* in these matters. Read and re-read Malachi 3:6-12 if you doubt it’s for *their* own good!

### **He’s scriptural...**

*As it is written: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.”* (2Cor. 8:15) *As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”* (2Cor. 9:9)

It’s always important to lead people *with* the Word of God and *to* the Word of God. I’m not just coming up with my good ideas when leading people. I’m speaking as an *“oracle”* of God! It’s especially crucial when leading people in giving their finances to lead them from God’s Word. There are so many deceivers out there who will *fleece* the sheep rather than *feed* them. Let’s feed them a true spiritual and biblical diet, which includes principles of generous giving.

### **He has personal integrity...**

*We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift.* (8:20)

Notice how careful he is. We also ought to err on the side of the meticulous when administrating the finances of the church. People have given their offerings in good faith. They’ve trusted our leadership; and we need to be worthy of that trust, and steward them with integrity. My guess is that there is a special and severe judgment for leaders who steal from the saints!

### **He has accountability...**

*For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.* (8:21)

The important way to be upright before God and men is to be accountable. Those who choose not to be so accountable are unwise. Lack of accountability puts us in potentially compromising circumstances, and even in a situation where we could be unjustly accused of dishonesty. Be accountable in every area of your life and ministry, but especially in the area of finances.

### **He challenges people to step out in faith...**

*So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.* (8:6)

I often say that I “prod and bother” people for a living! One of my goals is to get people out of their comfort zones. I recently had someone in our church, who had been challenged a lot to do things which required faith and obedience on his part. He said, “I can’t even remember where the comfort-zone was!” I had succeeded. Challenge the people you lead to trust God and be generous with their material wealth.

### **He has God’s praise as his greatest goal...**

*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.* (9:12)

I’m not receiving offerings from people in order to use it for personal gain. Nor am I trying to build my ministry empire. I want God to get glory and praise! And He gets that when people

give scripturally, sacrificially, and unselfishly.

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### Let's be practical

- For you to lead in the “grace of giving” you must first of all lead by example. That is, *you* must be giving scripturally and sacrificially before you can lead others to do so. Do you? If not, begin today!
  - For you to lead in the “grace of giving” you must secondly lead by teaching and exhorting. Are you like me in this? I’m a bit timid and almost apologetic at times when teaching about giving. I guess I’m trying to prove to people that I’m not just another con artist or religious salesman. But God knows our heart and that’s all that matters. If you have integrity in this area, then fearlessly teach and declare the truth! Ask God to lead you about how, when, and with whom you can soon share biblical principles of giving.
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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #28: Leaders must be tender and tough.**

#### **2 Corinthians 10:1-11**

***By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you --I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! 2 I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. 3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 6 And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. 7 You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. 8 For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. 9 I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. 10 For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." 11 Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.***

Throughout his ministry Paul demonstrated an unique balance of the tender-yet-tough approach in his leadership. He practices, as well as preaches, “*the meekness and gentleness of Christ.*” Yet at the same time he could be “weighty and forceful” with people.

One key to this balance was that he was clear about the source of his spiritual authority - *“the authority the Lord gave us.”* He also knew the proper use of his authority - *“for building you up rather than pulling you down.”* And he knew there was an improper use of spiritual authority which would force him to be, “harsh in his of authority” (13:10) and ultimately do more harm than good.

Though there were those who accused Paul of being wimpy when there in person, he refuted that; and claimed to practice a balance of tenderness and strength in his leadership.

He was tough enough to “command” people with the authority the Lord gave him:

- *Command and teach these things... - 1 Timothy 4:11*
- *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant... 1 Timothy 6:17*
- *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds... 1 Timothy 6:18*
- *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle... 2 Thessalonians 3:6*
- *Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down... 2 Thessalonians 3:12*

Paul was also tender enough in his approach to spiritual leadership that he could compare himself to a “mother” and a “father” of those he led:

*We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us... We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10*

- *May we be tough enough to tell the truth, to identify sin, to confront an erring brother, to stand for Christ when others fall, to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience and teaching.*
- *May we also be tender enough to weep with the hurting, to comfort the struggling, hold up the fainting, counsel the grieving, encourage the timid, and strengthen the weak.*

**“I want you to know what my weekly tithe will be...”**

Bob and his wife had attended our brand new church plant four or five times, before he invited me to his office for a visit. In contrast to the handful of young surfers that made up our church at that point, Bob was a wealthy business man. He was intent on telling me how much money he intended to contribute if they decided to make our church their home. I was suspicious of his motives, to say the least, but I shook his hand with a “God bless you.” A couple of weeks later we had had a guest speaker, and afterward someone called me to inform me that Bob had called several people (all new believers) in our fledgling church, with a critique of our speaker’s theology. Now it was clear to me that he had tried to “bribe” me into letting him have control of the disciples we were making. This didn’t make me a happy pastor! I went back to Bob’s office and calmly made it clear to him that he was not welcome to do this again, and that there are legitimate ways for us to deliberate theological

disagreements. I never saw Bob or his wife again. I knew that we needed God's pleasure more than we needed Bob's money.

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### Let's be practical

- Do you have any trouble being tender in your leading? Ask yourself, ask God, ask a trusted friend if you major in toughness out of giftedness or out of insecurity. If it's your gift, you'll be a better leader if you temper your approach with more meekness. If it's insecurity, then confess your weakness to God and ask Him to help you find security only in Him.
- Do you have any trouble being firm in your leading? Again, ask yourself, God and another person if you major on tenderness because of your gift of mercy or because you're insecure and need the approval of others. If it's the gift, ask God to help you be more balanced and bolder to confront others when necessary. If it's insecurity, ask Him to help you overcome it! And read John 5:44.

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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #29:**

**Leaders must conquer their tendency to compete and compare.**

#### **2 Corinthians 10:12-18**

**12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. 13 We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. 14 We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. 15 Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, 16 so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory. 17 But, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.**

He tells us of three things that are, "not wise" for spiritual leaders to do: *Classify*, *Compare*, and *Commend* themselves. Those who "classify" themselves are addicted to such things as status and titles. They concoct of a sort of "spiritual caste system" for the Body of Christ. Those who "compare" themselves with others, do so in order to make themselves feel better about their own inadequacies and insecurities. Leaders who feel a need to "commend" themselves are always dangerous. It's clearly a red flag when someone tends to repeatedly remind others of how important they are.

Some of the most competitive people in the world are spiritual leaders. I guess something good might come of it if we would channel that competitive energy into constructive Kingdom effort. But this is not usually the case. We worry about not preaching as well as the other guy, not influencing as many people as he does, not being as well loved, not being considered as successful, etc.

Frankly, this tendency has been one of my most tenacious foes in the ministry to overcome. It's the thing which has frequently discouraged, and even depressed me. I'm ashamed to admit that I've often focused on what I don't do, don't have, or can't accomplish in comparison with other leaders. I call it "Stressing for Success!"

*Oswald Chambers wrote, "If we begin to examine the outflow, we lose touch with the source. We have to pay attention to the source, and God will look after the outflow. Our Lord didn't say to his disciples, "I had a most successful time on earth; I have addressed 1000's of people and been the means of their salvation. Now you go and do the same kind of thing." He said: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."*

Paul's accusers were skilled at their game, but Paul refused to play. While in jail, and being persecuted by his "Christian brothers" he wrote: *"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice..."* (Philippians 1:15-18). That, to me, is the epitome of humility! His reputation and legacy didn't matter to him as much as the glory of God and the good of others.

It helps me to remember that each of us has a unique and personal assignment from God (*"a field God has assigned to us..."*). We're encouraged not to stretch ourselves beyond that assignment. If we'll heed this counsel and live only for the *"well done"* of the Lord, we'll conquer the tendency to *classify, compare, and commend* ourselves.

**His reputation and legacy  
didn't matter to him as  
much as the glory of God  
and the good of others.**

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### **Let's be practical**

- *"We confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us."* Everyone seems to want to be a "success" these days. But, I've learned that success is a moving target. That is, it's not the same thing for everyone at all times. Achieving what God assigns you to do is success. Ask the Lord what He wants you to be and do. Then ask Him if you are at least on your way to "success" in His eyes.

- But are you on schedule? Not only do you want to do God's will and follow His call to service. You also want to do it and grow into ministry maturity on His time-table. Ask Him the question, "Lord, am I on track? Am I on schedule with what you plan for me? Am I growing on your time-table for me?"
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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #30:**

**Leaders have a good deal of good godly jealousy.**

#### **2 Corinthians 11:1-4**

***1 I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. 2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.***

This may seem to contradict the preceding chapter. Are we supposed to be "jealous" or not? Well, yes and no. No, don't be jealous *of* your brothers, but do be jealous *for* them. What's the difference? When we're jealous *of* our friends it's because we want what they have. We want to be able to do what they can do. But when we're jealous *for* them we want them to have it all, all of Jesus, all of His kingdom, all of His power to do His will. This is the "godly jealousy" Paul displays.

The personal care and concern Paul showed those he led was incredible. He's speaking here like a father marrying off his daughter. He has a "*godly jealousy*" for them and insists on presenting them as "*pure virgins*" to Christ. He prays for them and leads them in such a way as to someday present them into *good hands in good condition!* While jealousy is usually a sin, this is a good jealousy, a quality modeled after God – the Jealous God (Exodus 20:5). He knows He's the best for us. So to be jealous for Him to get His due from those He loves is a good thing.

My job before God is to do all I that can to lead in such a way as to keep people pure while *waiting for the wedding*, and to make sure they get delivered to the Glorious Groom as pure virgins. I have a vested interest in this. I'm not just a dating service for the King. I am, in a sense, the "father" of the Bride with a passion to see the Bride maintain a health and purity unto her wedding to the Bridegroom!

***"What I'm about to say is not up for debate. I want you to leave here right now and never come back..."***

I know it sounds harsh, especially for a pastor to say to someone who attended our church for the first time. But I knew this guy was a fraud, and I couldn't let him deceive any of the young lambs of our new church. He walked around town in liturgical garb and claimed to be a priest of some kind. But actually, he was no priest, but a predatory homosexual. (I'm not saying that all gay people are predatory or masquerade as something they're not. But it was the case with this guy.) I told him in no uncertain terms to leave and not return. I wasn't going to debate it with him or become entangled in any sort of argument. I just knew that I had a job to do in order to keep these fledgling followers of Jesus safe, and I wasn't going to let this man or anyone else (if I could help it) derail them.

Shepherds carry both "a rod and a staff." The staff has that hook in it with which he rescues the trapped sheep. You might say that the staff has sort of a ministry of mercy. The "rod," on the other hand, is the shepherd's weapon that he uses when necessary against predatory animals and thieves. It's with the rod that the shepherd will drive away anything or anyone that threatens the safety and health of his flock. On this day, in order to be a faithful shepherd, I had to wield the rod!

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### Let's be practical

- Do you see yourself and your role as tenderly and passionately as Paul did? Do you see the exigency of preparing for Him, and presenting to Him, a radiant Bride? Like me, you might have gradually lost this kind of passion and perspective. Talk to the Groom Himself about it. Ask Him to give you the same love for his Bride that He has for her.
- Is there any particular current threat to the health of the friends you lead? Does it call for your use of "the rod" (which sometimes is wielded primarily in prayer)? Ask a friend to pray with you about this threat.

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### LEADERSHIP LESSON #31

#### Leaders make the best of bad circumstances

#### 2 Corinthians 11:25-27

*... three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

We've talked at length about Paul's persecution-sufferings. But you'll notice that some of the miserable conditions in which he found himself, though a clear consequence of his life of

service, were sufferings from more “natural” sources. Not only was he repeatedly beaten, jailed and slandered by people, but he also was shipwrecked, left adrift in the open sea, sleeplessness, starvation, and intense cold.

**The following is from my Memoir.**

If you have to suffer, you might as well try to do it well. When it comes to suffering well, one of my heroes is Paul. He was so enamored with Jesus that his sufferings were nothing but another opportunity to show-and-tell the King’s influence in his life.

In Acts 27, Paul was taken on an arduous 2000 mile journey as a prisoner to Rome. They faced gale-force winds and torrential storms that repeatedly threatened the lives of all 276 passengers on the ship. At one point in order to keep their ship intact, the sailors ran ropes around the hull. They threw everything overboard that weighed them down in the stormy waters, including their food supplies. Even the most experienced seamen on the journey lacked all hope of survival. They were lost at sea and saw no sunshine nor starlight for weeks.

Paul was in the same ship that his captors were in. He wasn’t exempt from the sufferings of his companions. He suffered sleeplessness and sea sickness right alongside of them. But rather than freaking out and letting his fears take control, he made the best of a very bad situation. Though he too felt the effects of the storm, he held onto the hope that held onto him. But the thing most impressive was that while suffering he continually stood up and spoke hope to the hopeless. He told everybody on the ship that God told him that they’d all be alright. He told them that God had a purpose for him to fulfill and that since their fate was tied to his, they were going to be alright because they were with him! You see the irony, right? Paul was merely a prisoner, as far as anyone knew, just a common criminal. This wasn’t a pleasure cruise and he wasn’t the captain of the ship.

Though this wasn’t the venue he’d expected for his ministry, he made the best of it. It’s almost like he forgot that he wasn’t in charge here. Or was he? He refused to play the victim, but rather took the position of spiritual influence. Instead of scared spectator, whining about how God was not treating him right, he became Master of Ceremonies - Ambassador for Christ. He was rocking and reeling right next to the rest of them. His misery was as real as theirs, but it wasn’t going to keep him from being the person of influence for Christ to which he was called.

This guy, Paul, was pretty much the same all the time! He never seemed to lose sight of his heavenly assignment no matter how bleak his earthly circumstances were. Here he was, a prisoner, in the throes of a sickening storm, shipwrecked on a strange island - and instead of being paralyzed by fear and self-pity, when everyone else lost theirs, he kept his head. Everybody around him lost hope. But because he stayed connected to the God of hope, he was able to bring the message of courage to the terrified.

After the storm finally spit them up onto the island of Malta, while collecting wood for a fire, Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake. Talk about adding insult to injury! He had just narrowly escaped a freezing storm, and now a snake (maybe representative of the ancient serpent himself) was waiting for him on dry ground. If *the storm* doesn't get you, *the snake* will! At least he'll try. But of course the Lord had a plan for that too. He turned that bad circumstance around for another ministry opportunity for Paul. He protected Paul and brought

healing to all of the sick people on the island. Before he and the others left there Paul had pretty much the entire population eating out of his hand.

Lord, if I have to suffer at all, help me suffer *well*. If I have to experience bad circumstances, help me to make the best of them so you'll get the credit you deserve and others will get the help they need.

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### Let's be practical

- How are you at making *the best out of your bad circumstances*? Are you experiencing any of those right now? Is it possible that there's a divine appointment in it somewhere? Can you see any kingdom opportunities in it at all? Ask someone to pray for you that you'll have the discernment to see them if they're there.
- "If *the storm* doesn't get you, *the snake* will!" I'm talking here about how our spiritual adversary is out to destroy us (especially those of us laboring in God's service). Are you experiencing any spiritual attacks these days? Read Ephesians 6 about our constant warfare, and the armor that we need for protection. Ask a friend to pray with you for the discernment you need in order to identify the particular battle front, and receiving the faith that you need to counter it in the name of the Lord.

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### LEADERSHIP LESSON #32:

**Leaders feel the failures and frailties of their followers.**

#### 2 Corinthians 11:28-29

**28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?**

Paul's sufferings were not just physical, and didn't just stem from persecution from unbelievers and other natural, or supernatural, causes. "*Besides everything else...*," the leader suffers with the pressure of his concern for the church!

I know what he means by the "*pressure of my concern*" for the church. It is a *pressure*, a *weight* indeed. The RSV translates it, "*the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.*" There are two things being referred to here: *pressure* and *concern*. Both of those are the "daily" experience of those who care for the church.

Paul's word for "*pressure*" is a Greek term which means "*a gathering together against.*" He's referring to the leader's crowd of cares, being surrounded by problems in the church which presses against him. I know just how this feels. The needs and struggles of others surround you, and threaten to steal your own peace of mind (and they often succeed!).

His word for “*concern*” is the same term he used in Philippians, “*Don’t be anxious about anything*” (4:7). Jesus used it in Matthew 6:25, “*Don’t be anxious for your life....*” The Greek term means to “*become drawn away, or distracted*” from your focus. When we have cares and worries, they tend to lure us away from what we want to, and need to, focus on.

I don’t think Paul is advocating leaders to be anxious, worried, distracted over the problems in the Church. It’s not something we *should do*. But it is definitely something we *do*. Why? At best, it’s because we care for people and don’t know how to draw the line between our job and God’s job. At worst, it’s because we don’t trust God to do His part, or we’re addicted to being needed (co-dependent). Either way, the caring spiritual leader will at times suffer from worry over the needs of his friends.

He describes an aspect of his sufferings in verse 29, “*Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*” He’s talking about his identification with those whose spiritual lives are not healthy. He’s intrinsically connected with his friends. He’s like a parent, suffering with every bad choice his child makes. He’s not aloof from his people, but feels their weaknesses and frailties as though they were his own. When someone stumbles, he feels the burning shame of it and the indignation against that which made them stumble.

The needs and struggles of  
others surround you,  
and threaten to steal  
your own peace of mind  
(and they often succeed!).

This is a quality to be desired by those who lead. The trick here is to *feel*, but not be destroyed or embittered by the feeling. The one extreme is to be impervious (even oblivious) to the failures and foibles of people. Some leaders don’t seem to let other’s lives affect their own. But that’s not a leader after the heart of God. The other extreme is to care so much that we buckle under the weight of trying to live *for* them (that is, we do their living *instead* of them doing it for themselves). One form of this extreme is to be always burdened down and anchored by the needs and problems of others. Sometimes this can lead to depression, and other times it may precipitate being continually angry at the failures of those we lead. Personally, I have spent way too much time in both of these extremes.

I think Paul found a balance of compassion and contentment. He learned how to be concerned, and even *hurt* with concern, and yet maintain his own righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

**I went to Steve’s house to confront him...**

He had been cheating on his wife for years and was a periodic drug user. And now, after a long battle with cancer, his wife, Sheila died. Shortly afterward, Steve was caught (by a family member) in his sin with another woman. Steve and Sheila were

part of our church, and I was angry about how he had been sinning with such impunity, and continued in it even after Sheila's demise. They had a number of children that were in agony over the loss of their mother, and now had to put up with the total breakdown of their father. I went to his house to rebuke him and took with me a church elder. I knew that I needed the accountability of having someone else there, because I was so angry about how hurt Steve's wife was that I might say or do something that I regretted later. When we got to his house, Steve was stoned. I tried to communicate with him in a Christ-like way. I rebuked him harshly, but tried to give him hope that, with God's help, he could be transformed into a godly man. He didn't respond at all. He just sat there in the dark living room, numb. The elder and I left the house and went out to my car. I just stood there in the street and wept profusely about how sad it was that this man that I loved was such a captive; and in his captivity, he not only wasted his life, but brought further pain to everyone else in his family. What he was doing was not only wrong, it was terribly sad.

I'm sorry to say that this story hasn't yet turned out with a win for the home team. Sometimes that's the way it is. But I told the story because of the surprising emotion that I experienced that day standing in the street weeping with my friend. I think I felt some of the pain to which Paul refers in my heart for the failures and frailties of my friends involved in this sad story. I couldn't fix it, I could only feel, with Jesus, the shame of it all. Sometimes that's all the spiritual servant can do.

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### Let's be practical

- Have you discovered by now that being a spiritual leader is not the most comfortable way to live?! If you hurt when people fall, that's good. It shows you have a heart for those you're leading. If your hurt doesn't go away and becomes infected with despair or bitterness, then something's wrong. Ask God to help you discover the balance of compassion and contentment.
- When you do feel overwhelmed by the "pressure" of your concern for the church, bring that pressure to Him. See if you can't unload some of that pressure on His strong shoulders. Remember, it's HIS Church that HE promised HE would build!

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**LEADERSHIP LESSON #33:**  
**Leaders learn to work with their own weaknesses.**

**2 Corinthians 11:30-12:1**

**30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33 But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and**

*slipped through his hands.*

**12:1 I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know --God knows. 3 And I know that this man --whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows-- 4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. 5 I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. 7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Have you ever thought about how being lowered in a basket felt to Paul? The great Saul of Tarsus barged into Damascus and escaped with his life having been lowered over the wall in a fish basket! This is the same man who later was caught up to the third heaven to hear spiritual things no one else was qualified to hear. Can you see the flyers for Paul's meetings – "Come hear from a man that was once escaped Jerusalem having been lowered in a basket"?!

A likely subtitle for this passage could be: "How Weakness Works In The Life Of The Leader." Paul's point here is that the best leaders are not only in touch with their own personal "weaknesses," but find God's greatest help in those very areas, and as such, they even brag about them! We usually think of leaders as being such strong individuals. But it seems to me that God usually uses people who have been humbled by their weakness. In fact, He most generally uses us in our weak areas rather than in our strong ones. Of course, He does use us in our strength, but usually only after we've been adequately broken by our weakness.

His "*power being made perfect in our weakness*" means to me that God is most likely to show up where I'm most likely to fall down! My weakness creates a vacuum for His strength to flood in and make up the difference. If I'm adequate to the task at hand, I won't be apt to ask for help. Until I'm desperate, I won't usually depend on power not my own. I usually don't trust God until I have to!

Great leaders are "lowered in baskets" and brag about how weak they are! We can't be called "Princes with God (Israel)" until we walk with a limp (Genesis 32). Until then we walk with the swagger of a "Jacob" (a grabber, trickster, swindler). God can use a Jacob, but can't often bless one. We need a limp!

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### **Lets' be practical**

- List your top five weaknesses. Next to each one write down how each has driven you to dependence upon the Lord and benefited you spiritually in someway.

- Take that list of weaknesses and, once again, submit them to Him. Ask Him to either change those areas of your life or harness the weakness for His glory somehow.
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### **LEADERSHIP LESSON #34:**

**Leaders feel all of the aches and pains of parenthood.**

#### **2 Corinthians 12:14-19**

**14 Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? 16 Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! ...19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.**

I would have thought that Paul couldn't have spoken more affectionately and tenderly than he has already spoken. But here, he does just that! He speaks like a parent whose consuming desire is to "save up for" his children and provide for them in such a way as to secure their future. He's willing to "spend everything" and "expend himself" for this goal. What's most amazing is that he's willing to do all this even if they couldn't care less. He doesn't mind; everything he does is *for their strengthening!*

We've referenced the following passage before, but it bears repeating here...

*"...but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."* (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12)

Parenting is a pain! Well, I don't mean it like it sounds. I absolutely love being a dad. It's one of my life's greatest joys. My two children are truly and "apple of my eye." If I loved them any more than I do already, I think my heart would probably explode. So, when I say parenting is a "pain," I really mean that it's often a painful enterprise. It brings me pain sometimes. The reason for this is because parenting includes *vulnerability*. Children have the uncanny power (unintentionally wielded, I'm sure) to hurt their parents, and that's because parents care so much. It's been said that the degree that you love, you have the ability to be hurt. David, for example, was grievously hurt by his son Absalom. Though Absalom couldn't overthrow the King's throne, he certainly could, and did, wound his dad's heart!

Another reason parenting can be painful is that it entails *delayed gratification*. You invest and invest, and *someday* you may see your investment "mature." It sometime takes a long time to see the fruit of our parenting-labors in the character of our children. That's often painful! But worth every tear!

One last reason it's painful to be a parent is the distinct lack of control we have over the choices of those we're "raising." We can't control their will or their choices, and we have to give them the chance to decide for themselves. And when they do choose unwisely, we hurt! And when their poor choices hurt them, we hurt even more.

Of course, the flip side of parenting is its incredible joys. There's simply nothing better in life than influencing your own child (whether biological or spiritual) toward a godly and healthy life. It's one of the greatest joys in my life to know the way, go the way, and show the way to my children.

*"I have not greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."* 3 John 4

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### Let's be practical

- Are you feeling the pains of *spiritual parenthood* right now? Maybe you'll want to look at the bigger picture, the long-range process. It might just help to think about how what you're doing today will affect those you lead five, ten, twenty years from now. Stop and pray for the futures of those you're serving.
  - As a parent (and a spiritual parent), I often succumb to self pity when feeling the pains of parenthood. If that's the case with you, remember who you are doing it all for. Remember, it is first of all before God that you lead. Do what you do for His glory. Secondly, do what you do for the good of others. You're expending yourself as a spiritual parent for "their strengthening." Live all out for the glory of God and the good of people! Make a mental list of the things you're doing in your discipleship of others and assess whether or not each activity is for the glory of God and the good of others.
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**LEADERSHIP LESSON #35:**  
**Leaders hope for the best and prepare for the worst.**

**(2 Corinthians 12:20-21)**

***20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. 21 I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.***

"Love hopes all things," says Paul elsewhere. Here he models that kind of hopeful love. He hopes that they'll be better than it seems they are, but prepares himself for the humbling experience of having to rebuke them if they aren't.

I know that “preparing for the worst” doesn’t sound like much of a faith posture. And maybe it isn’t. But Paul says three times that he’s “*afraid*” that they will not respond to the healthily to the truth, that they will reject his counsel, and live in such a way as to grieve both him and the Lord. As spiritual leaders, we must have a vision of what we want people to be like (remember the lesson on 5:16-17). We want to see through eyes of hope and faith. But at the same time, we must realize that they have a will of their own, and that God has chosen to leave certain things free of His control. In other words, they are free to choose whether or not to do the right thing. So as leaders we shoot for the moon, and set ourselves to thank God if they hit the trees!

Paul’s terms are personal, affectionate, and emotional. “I am afraid... I fear that... and I will be grieved...” It’s always “*humbling*” for the good leader when his friends fail, because he identifies himself with them. Their joys are his joys, their sorrows are his sorrows, their shame, his shame. When they stumble, he burns (11:29). When they fail he “mourns” over them as though they had somehow died. This is yet another example of how spiritual leadership is not for the faint-hearted. It can be painful. Are you willing to experience these pains for the sake of the Lord and those He loves?

But if you’re willing to continue loving and investing yourself in others, though there will be disappointments, there will be cause for great celebrations for lives changed and victories won. Pour all you can into your friends, giving them every chance to succeed in their lives in the Lord, and remember that it’s *their* lives, not yours.

Their joys are his joys,  
their sorrows are his sorrows,  
their shame, his shame.

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### Let’s be practical

- “*Hoping for the best...*” do you do that with those you lead, even those who fail the most often? Choose one person in whose life you are investing, and ask yourself what *hoping for the best* would entail. Ask God to help you do it.
- Often in spiritual leadership we can become calloused and jaded merely out of emotional survival. When people fail over and over, my tendency is to divorce myself emotionally from them so as to protect myself from the grief. Does this happen to you? Ask the Lord if you need a fresh baptism in His love and compassion for people

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### LEADERSHIP LESSON #36:

**Leaders are servants who devote their lives to making other people successful.**

### 2 Corinthians 13:5-9

**5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you --unless, of course, you fail the test? 6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. 7 Now we pray to God that you**

***will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. 8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 9 We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection.***

A good teacher wants everyone he teaches to listen in class, learn the lessons, and pass the tests. Even if he's not revered by others to be a great success as a teacher, he's happy if his students succeed. I like to say that a *spiritual leader leads by serving and serves by leading*. His chief concern is about those he serves. He's not worried about *his* reputation, *his* success, *his* résumé!

I have often not lived up to this standard of service and level of personal humility. I've often been more anxious about *my* sense of personal success than the spiritual successes of my friends that I'm serving. I've been more interested in someone's opinion of *me* and *my* leadership, than in how well *they're* doing in their service to Christ.

Over the years I've had disciples with whom I have fallen out of favor. Our relationship, which once had been healthy, had diminished to disrespect and distance. They no longer appreciated me as a mentor or as a brother. In each case it broke my heart. But these brothers did go on to serve Jesus with all their heart and passion. They no longer appreciated me, but they did still love the Lord and his purposes. I had to remind myself that this is what it is all about! My goal was to love and follow Jesus, not me.

In fact, I want every disciple that I have the privilege to influence to surpass me in the life and advance of the Kingdom. I want them to stand on my shoulders and see what I can't see so they can go places I've not gone. To my mind, that's success in spiritual leadership. The old saying is that, "There is no success without a successor." I not only want those that I influence to succeed me, but to succeed *beyond* me. Oswald Chambers wrote, "*It is in the solitary life that we prove whether we are willing to be made the unadvertised life for the community to which we belong – whether we are willing to be made bread or to be simply the advertisement for bread. If we are to be made bread, then we must not be surprised if we are treated in the way our Lord was treated.*"

I'm deeply convicted by what Paul says. He doesn't care if he "*seemed to have failed,*" just as long as they "*do what is right!*"

God, give me that kind of servant's heart!

**I want them to stand on my shoulders  
and see what I can't see  
so they can go places I've not gone.**

***It was a bleak day when I realized...***

... that I was more concerned about someone staying in "my ministry" than I was about them continuing in the service of Jesus. For several years I had invested as much love and life as I possessed in Ken. I saw him born into the kingdom, take his

first baby steps as a disciple, and incrementally overcome bad habit after bad habit with the strength that Jesus gave him. We had become close friends and mutual confidants. When he felt called to a life of spiritual service I enjoyed observing his fledgling steps in teaching, discipling, and leading others. I loved this young man like a son.

Ken came to see me one day and, out of the blue, told me that he was leaving our ministry to go somewhere else. He gave me no reason for it, but he just had to go. It wasn't like he was going to the mission field or anything; he was just going to another church. I was devastated. This had happened before and would happen again, but this one hurt more than the others because I had opened my heart so widely to this young man. He was both a brother and a son to me; and now, without explanation, he was gone.

It wasn't like he didn't want to serve Jesus anymore. He loved the Lord, and he intended to find a home and a place of service elsewhere. He and his wife went to a sister church to ours, and found just what there were looking for. They made a bunch of new friends, got real involved in the body life there and became close personal friends with the lead pastor (who was a friend of mine). I grieved as though he had died or something! It wasn't as though he was backslidden. They just *slid* into another spiritual family.

Like I said, this wasn't the first and wouldn't be the last time something like this would occur. But the thing I learned about myself from this was that I am often more concerned for *my ministry* than God's ministry. Ken went on to do things for God that I probably wouldn't have been able to help him achieve. But I was bummed that he wasn't going to *my church* (you know how stupid that sounds, right?! I could say all the right words, "I'm just worried about his spiritual state." But they wouldn't have been entirely honest. I was mostly worried about *my ministry* and trying to increase our church's size and influence. I was working as hard as that other pastor, and my young protégé preferred to be in *his* church rather than *mine!* I wouldn't have been any more distressed had he totally fallen away from Jesus. I'm ashamed to tell you that, but it's the way it was.

About 15 years later, Ken came to me and asked for my forgiveness. He said, "I really don't know why I did what I did. I can't account for what came over me to simply bail on you so abruptly, but I'm sorry if it hurt you in any way." We hugged, affirmed our love for each other, and all was well. But the lesson was clear to me. As a spiritual parent I should want my children to leave the nest and do things that I'll never be able to do. It's not about whose ministry they are linked to, what's important is that they keep serving right Person for the right reason. Because in our churches we're obsessed with our numbers, we don't want anyone to ever leave our ministries. We're addicted to what makes us look successful. And as *success addicts*, we try to impress and possess people rather than invest in them and send them with our blessing into their own mission field.

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## Let's be practical

- Examine your heart. What is your motive for being a spiritual leader? Be honest. Are you more concerned for your success as a leader than you are for the success of those you lead? Ask the Holy Spirit to search and try your heart on this matter.
- One way to test this is by looking at the way we relate to those who have left “our ministry” to join someone else’s. Am I more concerned about *my* feelings, *my* record, *my* successes; or about *their* success in the Lord? Am I happy that they’re doing well spiritually even if they are doing so under another’s leadership? Can I be “glad whenever I am weak and they are strong?”

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Thus, concludes our *Learning Leadership Lessons from 2 Corinthians*. I trust you’ve somehow benefited from this study, that you will apply what you’ve learned, and pass the lessons on to those you disciple into leadership... *for the glory of God and the good of people!*