



Essential Lessons for Christian Leaders



Called to Be:
Essential Lessons For Christian Leaders

by Bruce Zachary

Eccl. 12:12-14 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Copyright 2015 by Bruce Zachary

Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

The Church needs effective leaders. Many good and godly resources help us to understand what we should *do* as leaders. What we must *do* is critical, but it may be distinct from the more important issue: what should a Christian leader *be*? Have you ever wondered, “What do I want to be in ministry?” There are abundant answers to that question, and some of them are likely more God-honoring than others. So it is an essential inquiry to ponder, because what you want to be is often what you become. The more important issue to contemplate is *what has God called you to be?*

I was recently asked by a friend, fellow-laborer and respected kingdom leader to present a seminar to a group of Christian leaders. He asked me to share what I considered to be some of the most important leadership lessons. I’m blessed to serve in a role of helping to train Christian leaders and have written on the subject. So when I began to contemplate the idea of the most important leadership lessons there was an abundance of information to distill. However, when I prayed and changed the focus to what I believe God has called me to *be* in ministry a manageable, and Lord willing, encouraging list of principles began to quickly take shape. The following is a list of principles I believe God has called me to exhibit in ministry and that represent essential leadership lessons:

Be Connected to Christ

Be a “C” Student

Be Faithful

Be Excellent

Be Balanced

Be About Your Father’s Business

Be a Dreamer

Be Humble

Principle 1: Be Connected to Christ

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing [Jn. 15:5].

The beauty of grapes ...

What do you consider to be the most important spiritual principle? Surely there are many acceptable and reasonable answers to the question, so here is mine: One of the blessings of living in California is seeing the beautiful vineyards in a region of the globe renowned for producing some of the world's best grapes. It is breathtaking to see row after row of vines lifted up on stakes hanging with heavy clusters of grapes as far as the eye can see. It's an image easily associated with Jesus' teaching in John 15 where He declared that He is the true vine and His disciples are the branches. The whole imagery of grapes lifted up, watered and pruned to produce fruit, more fruit and much fruit is familiar to people in this part of the world as it was to Jesus' original audience.

The Master explained that the key to bearing fruit was the believer's connection to Christ. Jesus repeats the word abide [*meno*] almost ten times in ten verses to emphasize the cause and effect relationship between bearing fruit and dwelling with Christ. To abide means to remain or dwell with. To continue the agrarian imagery we can see that abide means *to be connected to* – like grapes to a vine, and a believer to Christ.

Selma California, an area in the fertile central valley of the state, is recognized as the world's largest producer of raisins. You can drive for miles in awe, seeing row after row of large clusters of grapes lying on the ground upon brown paper drying in the California sun. It is an impressive and a sobering site because the only difference between a grape and a raisin is the connection to the vine and the passage of time.

It is relatively easy to tell the difference between a beautiful grape and a raisin. Also you can see a grape as it transforms to a raisin. The transition resulting from not being connected to the vine is evident. Similarly it can be observable when our spiritual condition starts to look more like raisins than grapes. I hope that people look at my life and see “grapes” – a life connected to Christ. I don't want those who know me best to see my spiritual life and think, “raisin.” I actually give permission and encourage those who know me well to tell me, “Bro you are starting to look like a raisin.” That kind of feedback helps me to consider whether I'm connected to Christ.

In the context of John 15 Jesus' theme was fruit bearing rather than salvation. So, I'm not suggesting that any true believer can lose their salvation. **What I am suggesting is that someone who is intimately connected with Christ manifests the beauty of grapes in all their fruit bearing glory. And Christians who are distant from Christ**

start to appear more like raisins in their spiritual lives. So how can you as a follower of Christ and a Christian leader remain close or intimate with Christ? I'd like to suggest three ways to remain connected that have been essential to my spiritual life:

- 1. Connecting to Christ through the Word of God**
- 2. Connecting to Christ through prayer**
- 3. Connecting to Christ through the awareness of your story intersecting with the author and finisher's work.**

What does connecting with Christ through the Word of God mean?

As followers of Christ we know intuitively the importance of the Bible as God's revelation. Also, we have discovered man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God [Matt. 4:4]. So disciples seek to regularly read the Bible. Perhaps you have a plan to read a certain number of chapters a day or week, or perhaps a certain amount of time for Bible reading. As leaders who teach the Bible you also presumably spend significant time studying the Bible to prepare to teach. These times of Bible reading are opportunities for connecting with Christ. Each of us has, ideally, had the experience of sensing God speak to us through His word. You've sensed a particular verse or passage of Scripture was God speaking to you in a unique way that was intimate and wonderful – the epiphany moments.

I remember early in my ministry experience when I read John 15 and came to verse 5, *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."* I felt so convicted. It felt like God was speaking in a still small inner voice to me that I was trying to do ministry in my strength and that my intellect or disciplines could not produce any good apart from Christ. I felt humbled as I sensed God speak, but wonderfully encouraged that God was speaking and it was intimate, powerful, and I knew I was connected even as I was corrected. Then I sensed the Lord gently encourage me with the promise that is also contained in verse 5, that if I was connected to Him I would bear much fruit. Again there was the awareness of the reality of the risen Christ and the peace comfort and assurance of our connection and His desire to bless me. This experience was merely one of countless that would be enjoyed and cultivated through the years.

Connecting through the Word can be likened to a marriage relationship. My wife and I enjoy many meals together and time together when we discuss the events of the day, life, our plans, and perhaps our feelings. Generally there is an overall sense that we are connected in relationship and that I want to hear from her and share with her. Sometimes they can be somewhat superficial and sometimes amazingly vulnerable and intimate.

This is how I view my regular Bible reading times. In addition, we have regularly scheduled date days or nights where we spend significant time together. In the midst of those opportunities there have also been wonderful memories and times of intimate

connection. In my marriage, I thank God for the comfort in our relationship, and the general awareness that we are connected. But I also long for those special times where the sense of connection and intimacy is greater. Those are the epiphany moments I'm seeking to experience with Christ through His word. Sometimes they come in the course of routine reading and sometimes they are cultivated as I carve out significant time to hear from God through His word. But whenever they happen they are treasured.

What does connecting with Christ through prayer mean?

Have you ever had one of those experiences where you are praying and feel especially connected to Christ? Sometimes our prayers don't seem too connected or inspired. I assume we've all prayed for God's blessing over a meal without a great sense of connection.

I was recently reading the account of the terrible storm on Paul's voyage to Rome [Acts 27]. At verse 29 we read, "They dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come." Who are the "they" referred to in the verse? Presumably the Egyptian sailors or Roman soldiers on board the ship. So presumably the Egyptians and Romans are pagans praying to pagan gods. They pray for "day to come." In essence it is a prayer to stop the storm or to survive the storm. Certainly Christians should pray like this to the true and living God. We should cry out to God in our desperation and make our requests known to Him. However as followers of Christ our prayers can reveal a deeper sense of connection to God.

For example my wife suffers from lupus. It is appropriate and good for me to pray and ask God to heal her and to cure the lupus. But when I'm feeling connected to Christ [or want to feel connected] my prayers may sound like this, "Lord what do you want me to learn from this? How are you using this to teach me to be more compassionate or empathetic? Lord how are you using this to make me a better husband or dad? Jesus will you please remind Karen that you are using this for your glory and her ultimate good. Please show her that you love her and that she is not being punished." When prayers are intimate and/or intense there is often a wonderful sense of connection to Christ.

What does connecting to Christ through the awareness of your story intersecting with the author and finisher's work mean?

Sometimes we make the connection of the intersection of our life story and the author and finisher of faith – Jesus [Heb. 12:2]. While riding my bike on the Pacific Coast Highway [PCH] I was hit by a car. The car was likely going over 50 mph and I wasn't wearing a helmet. I suffered an elbow fracture and plenty of abrasions and lacerations. Remarkably I walked away and six weeks later was essentially fully healed. Following the accident I had the awareness that God had spared my life because He was going to keep using my life to represent Him and advance his kingdom. There was a sense of connection as I saw God's story and my story intersect. Similarly, and less dramatically, there are numerous days that I wake up and am keenly aware that my life in general is a

gift from God to be used to advance His kingdom, represent Him, and to enjoy simply because He is a blessing God. Throughout each day in countless ways there are opportunities to see the intersection of God's story and your life. When you discover the intersection there is often a greater sense of connection to Christ.

I've discovered that when I seek to be connected to Christ and pursue these familiar places of connection to Him that I tend to feel more like a beautiful cluster of grapes rather than a spiritual raisin. So for me the most important spiritual principle is, be connected to Christ. So if you are starting to feel like a raisin look to connect with Christ.

Lifework:

- 1. Describe a season in your life where you were intimately connected with Christ and some of the fruit that was manifest.**
- 2. Describe how you have recently felt connected to Christ through the Word.**
- 3. Describe how you have recently felt connected to Christ through prayer.**
- 4. Describe how you have recently felt connected to Christ through the awareness of your story intersecting with the author and finisher's work.**

Principle 2: Be a “C” Student

“The ‘C’ students run the world.” - President Harry S. Truman

The need for “C” students ...

In school I tried to be an above average student. The idea of being a “C” student was never attractive to me. But in ministry I want to be a “C” student. Let me try to explain why. Effective ministry is a team activity. In order to leverage gifts and skills to advance God’s kingdom people need to work together as a team. You want to be part of a team of people with common passions and complimentary skills. When you start to think about being part of a team it is typical to consider what kind of teammates you want on the team with you. However, you may not be as quick to contemplate what kind of team member *you* want to be. The following is a list of traits that I want to embody (and that I look for in teammates):

1. Character: God places a premium on Christ-like character in selecting leaders [1Tim. 3, Titus 1, Gal. 5:22-23]. Be a person who reflects Christ-like character. While ability and dynamic personality tend to be attractive elements they are counter-productive for the kingdom if not bridled by character. Over time, you’ll discover that character is the most important qualification. If something makes you feel uneasy about another person’s character it is probably wise to be very slow to put them on your team. My earnest desire is that the people that I minister to and minister with will regard me as a person of character and integrity. I try to create an environment where people can freely express any concerns about my character. I want to be quick to listen and slow to speak. In other words I don’t want to get defensive or justify my attitudes or actions. I generally assume that there is at least a kernel of truth in any concern. I look to glean the kernels and let the chaff blow away. Then confess, repent and grow forward.

2. Commitment: You want to be the type of person who other people on the team know will be faithful to fulfill their responsibilities and commitments to the team. Christians are free to come and go as God leads them. Yet I want my reputation to be that I am committed to complete the work that I’ve taken on. The amount of energy needed to train team members and forge a healthy team dynamic encourage me to be committed and look for committed people in ministry (and life generally). Committed people provide a sense of security and stability to a team that can help create an attractive ministry environment. I want my wife, our sons, our family and friends, and those that I serve and serve with to know that they can count on me.

3. Consensus: Seek team members who generally share the same vision philosophy of ministry and doctrinal views as you. There will always be slight divergence regarding non-essential issues and variation in style or approach. However there needs to be general consensus. If the team doesn’t understand the vision and agree with the vision

then there will definitely be confusion and conflict among the team. Therefore for you to be able to establish consensus you need to know what you believe, why you believe it, where you are, and where you believe that God is leading. In essence you need to know your philosophy of ministry doctrine and vision. Then you can develop consensus. Articulate your vision and philosophy frequently and look to determine if the rest of the team understands and agrees. Seek to work through any major differences as you discuss your varying views. If you are unable to forge consensus on significant matters than change to either team or philosophy is likely.

4. Competency: Are you and other team members able to develop your gifts and use skills effectively? Develop your God-given skills to achieve greater competency and look for others who want to do the same. In other words can you do the work that is required today, and if God blesses the effort and the influence expands are you willing to develop greater capacity to continue to be competent? What is your present level of competency and what is your perceived future capacity? I attend conferences, read materials, work with mentors and develop accountability to improve my competency. Similarly I want to work with people who are looking to improve their capacity.

5. Compatibility: We place a premium on the community experience and seek teammates who desire the same [Ac. 2:42-47]. You're going to spend a lot of time serving and working together so it is best to find people you enjoy being with. No matter how talented someone is, if it feels like you're banging your head against a wall being with him it's probably not a good idea for him to be on your core team. Incompatibility may be unrelated to someone's character. They may have great character but the personalities simply don't mesh. Be the type of person who can be compatible with as many different kinds of people as possible, and then seek to team up with others who are compatible with you.

6. Compassion: Jesus trains His disciples to be compassionate people who care for the needs of others [Mk. 6:34]. If you are talented but lack compassion you may experience some measure of success as the world defines it, but you will not be successful as the Lord desires and requires. Some leaders are very focused on achieving a task. That is a helpful trait in leaders, but if they don't have genuine compassion for people then the task becomes the priority rather than the people who will benefit from the achieved task. So you need people on the team who care about people not just accomplishing a task.

7. Courage: I have a friend who is a gifted water-skier. She gets up on her ski the first try and circles the lake without ever falling. Then she lets go of the tow rope and gracefully glides into the water where she is picked up and enters the boat with perfectly dry hair. That might sound wonderful to you, but to me it is not the type of leader I want to be nor is it the type of personality that I want on my core team. If you always "keep your hair dry" presumably you're not taking any chances. People who take chances will inevitably fall, but they also get to experience adventure. Learn to take chances as led by God – steps of faith. Life and ministry require courage. Nevertheless it can be very

frightening even for godly people to cross the Jordan and embark on a conquest of the Promised Land [Josh. 1:1-9]. People fear: the challenges, failure, measuring up to another (leader), and letting go of the known in favor of the unknown. Develop your God-given courage by taking ventures of faith. Small steps of faith that are blessed by Christ encourage larger leaps of faith. There is a difference between courage and simply impulsive or adventurous behavior. Ventures of faith and courage are Spirit-prompted and glorify God. Be strong and of good courage and surround yourself with teammates who will also be courageous.

8. Calling: What are you called to? You will discover different callings in different seasons of your life and ministry. Your calling will always be something that honors God (or it isn't your calling), and will tend to maximize your gifts and abilities. Your calling is likely related to something you are passionate about. What moves you to cry or to laugh? What keeps you up at night or causes you to wake early in the morning? Where are you gifted and how does it advance God's kingdom? As you experience life seek to discern what you are called to be and to do. You will never find satisfaction until you discover and fulfill your calling. Once you have a sense of what you are called to then find others with a common or complimentary calling. Finally, avoid the temptation to try and manipulate people to join your team because you believe they will help your effort apart from a sense of confirmation from God that they too are called to the team.

President Truman famously remarked, "The 'C' students run the world." In an ideal world, I'd suggest the "C" students advance the kingdom. So be a "C" student.

Lifework:

- 1. Which of the traits do you feel are the most important and why?**
- 2. Have you ever added someone to your team who lacked one of these traits? What happened?**
- 3. What trait(s) would you like to grow in during this coming season of life and ministry? Avoid the temptation to say, "All of them" and take time to reflect.**

Principle 3: Be Faithful

“It is required in stewards that one be found faithful” [1Cor. 4:2].

“Doing what is right to GOD gives you peace not regret” — Rudzani Ralph

What do you think of when you hear the term, “faithful”? Here are some associations: true to one’s word, steady, loyal, constant, committed, reliable, trusted, believed. What do you think of as an opposite of faithful? God’s view on these concepts may surprise you. **Let’s first consider, what faithfulness is, and why is it important. Then we’ll approach the issue of how to be faithful.**

Faithfulness defined

First a practical **definition**, *faithfulness is doing what God has called you to do with the right attitude.*

Jesus embodies faithfulness.

Christ’s faithfulness to the Father and to us should motivate our faithfulness to God and others. In my twenty-five plus years of ministry experience I’ve grown to appreciate this quality as vital. Unfortunately, I’ve seen very dynamic and talented people who were not faithful and therefore produced little fruit for the kingdom. I’ve also observed people who were faithful in their careers and to their family but never demonstrated faithfulness to their calling. These people similarly did not appear to bear much kingdom fruit. In contrast the people who learned to be faithful like Jesus are pillars. They not only are faithful in their calling but they also show faithfulness in the marriage family and career realms. And as you might imagine they bear abundant fruit for Christ’s kingdom.

Jesus links faithfulness and goodness.

When we stand before Jesus we yearn to hear our Lord commend us for how we lived our lives for Him. In the Parable of the Talents Jesus describes those who have used their God given abilities for His kingdom as “good and faithful” [Matthew 25:14-30]. In the same parable Jesus declares that those who are **unfaithful are wicked**. We generally associate the unfaithful as, flaky, unreliable, not dependable, and procrastinators. So the apparent harshness of Jesus’ assessment is remarkable and sobering. In essence if we are not good and faithful we are lazy and wicked.

Paul links faithfulness with effective Christian living.

Faithful people are aware that time is a commodity and that every individual’s supply is limited; and time should be used wisely to accomplish what God has called them to. Paul understood this when he exhorted, *“Redeeming the time because the days are evil”* and connected the call with the need to be filled with the Holy Spirit [see, Eph. 5:16-18, Gal. 5:22]. Jonathan Edwards’ resolution to never to waste a moment of time may represent the extreme ideal of faithfulness. Paul wanted the church at Corinth to know that although they possessed spiritual gifts and thus potential they needed to

understand that those gifts would not be developed without faithfulness. So the gentle correction and exhortation, *"It is required in stewards that one be found faithful"* [1Cor. 4:2]. God apparently places a premium on faithfulness. Finally, in Paul's swansong address to Timothy he charges his protégé, *"And the things that you heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also"* [2Tim. 2:2] [emphasis mine].

Faithfulness is characterized as finishing well.

I love fireworks! I love the spectacle, the anticipation, and the celebration. I love that no matter how much education you have that you are reduced to monosyllabic utterances like "oooh and aaah!" And then it's over no more fireworks time to pack up and go. I don't want my Christian life or ministry to be like fireworks. God desires faithfulness characterized by finishing well. If the Christian life is a race then it is a marathon not a sprint. In Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare, the hare is speedy, but lacks faithfulness. The tortoise prevails despite his obvious limitations, because he is a faithful plodder. Step by step, competing by the rules, making steady progress, he finishes to the praise of those at the finish line. God would rather have faithful tortoises than unfaithful hares.

I want to be like Paul: be faithful and finish well. The Apostle Paul was committed. He was able to say to the elders of the church at Ephesus that even death threats were not going to move him from finishing his ministry to the Lord. *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God"* [Acts 20:24]. Paul was faithful even to the end. Paul's final letter of the divine record concludes, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"* [2Tim. 4:7-8]. I, along with countless others, saw Pastor Chuck Smith a very faithful man finish well. That is the type of testimony that I want.

On the other hand, Demas did not finish well. Consider his regression: Paul refers to Demas as *"a fellow laborer"* [Philemon 1:24 (59A.D.)]. Paul was saying that they were in the same league. About a year later, Paul simply says, *"and Demas"* [Col. 4:14 (60A.D.) *"Luke the beloved physician and Demas"*]. Paul makes no comment about Demas being in the same league. Finally, Paul would write, *"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world"* [2Tim. 4:10 (62 A.D.)]. In essence, Demas failed to finish well, because he loved this world more than God. The sad commentary of Demas life is that he failed to finish well.

Faithfulness requires commitment.

One of the great obstacles in our culture and the Church today is commitment. Faithfulness and commitment are related concepts. People are afraid of commitment because they are frequently afraid of making sacrifice for God or others. We can bring this attitude of our culture into the church. A lack of commitment is demonstrated when we approach our relationship with the Lord as an option for our lives rather than the essence of our lives. The problem is that we are double-minded [Ja. 1:6-8]. Our lack of

confidence in God is caused by a lack of commitment to God, which results in being unstable in all your ways. People do not want to put too many eggs in a basket if they don't expect the eggs to make it to the desired destination. The solution is described at the end of James' letter [Ja. 4:6-8]: 1. Submit to God, 2. Resist the devil, 3. Draw near to God, and 4. Deal with sin [cleanse & purify]. Faithful people are committed to God. Finally, it is comforting to know that even when we fail to be faithful God remains faithful [2Timothy 2:13]. Nevertheless seek to be faithful.

How to be faithful:

Grow-up.

The early church regularly engaged in essential disciplines to help them grow as disciples (Christians), "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers*" [Acts 2:42]. Here, we see four essential elements to spiritual growth:

1. Doctrine: They regularly learned and lived (applied) the Word of God. We are blessed to have the opportunity to study the Word of God, and to have access to sound Bible teaching. Those who regularly learn and live doctrine will grow faster than those who do not. Sound doctrine is necessary for proper spiritual development.

2. Fellowship: The church is a community. When we gather regularly as a community we encourage others as well as being encouraged by them. When we spend time together with other Christians we strengthen each other and grow.

3. Breaking of bread: The breaking of bread refers to common meals as well as partaking of the Lord's Supper [communion]. The observation of the Lord's Supper is intended to stir believers to remember the Lord and develop an intimate relationship with Him. The practice of common meals is intended to encourage the development of meaningful intimate Christian relationships with other believers. Faithfulness flows from an authentic relationship with Jesus into authentic relationships with others.

4. Prayer: The church needs to learn to depend on God. Prayer strengthens relationship with Christ, and declares our dependency upon Him. Through prayer we communicate with God. We not only make our requests known to Him, but we also hear from Him. People of prayer grow.

Show up.

Learn to commit. As you mature, it is typical that you begin to make commitments to serve the Lord. It is only reasonable that once you begin to appreciate God's love, you want to respond and serve Him. Once you make a commitment come through. Let your "yes" be "yes." If you say you will do something or be somewhere other people should be able to expect you to do it or be there because you are faithful. Sometimes the fear

of not being faithful can paralyze us so that we won't commit. Other times people commit without an earnest desire to come through. Faithfulness yields a desire to commit and come through.

In essence I want to grow up show up and be faithful. Doing what is right to God gives me peace not regret.

Lifework:

- 1. What do you think of when you hear the term faithful?**
- 2. Why do you think faithfulness is important?**
- 3. What do you believe are some obstacles to faithfulness?**
- 4. Describe the areas of your life that you would like to be more faithful in this season, and what faithfulness looks like in that area?**

Principle 4: Be Excellent

“That you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ...” [Phil. 1:10]

“Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude” – Ralph Marston

Your excellence is important because it tends to influence other people’s perception of your God. Consider the Queen of Sheba’s encounter with King Solomon. She was drawn to Solomon’s fame for wisdom and sought answers to the mysteries of life. Solomon gave wise answers to her most challenging questions [2Chron. 9:1-9]. The Queen was impressed regarding his wisdom, palace, food, the seating of servants, service and apparel of waiters and cupbearers, as well as the entry to the temple of God. Thus she was impressed by Solomon’s wisdom and the overall excellence that she saw. The Queen was extremely wealthy and presumably encountered excellence in several arenas of life. Nevertheless, she praises Solomon’s wisdom; and praises the God of Israel for what she heard [God’s wisdom] and what she saw [excellence]. **The moral: excellence in life and ministry attracts people to receive the wisdom of God, and results in being drawn to God and glorifying Him.** Conversely a disregard for excellence can create stumbling blocks between people and God.

In the context of the local church, the perceived quality of various elements of the worship service likely impact people’s receptivity to the word of God. For example, people form opinions about the facilities, greeters and ushers, children’s ministry, praise and worship, hospitality, prayer, outreach, missions, community service, etc. If people perceive that things are generally done excellently then they are likely to be more receptive to the teaching of the Bible. Furthermore, the teaching of the Bible should be excellent to encourage people to submit to God and to live His word. **Looking to improve and do things excellently doesn’t mean you are not: loving gracious or led by the Spirit.** You can rejoice and celebrate your current status, and move forward towards excellence. Furthermore asking, “Where can we improve?” is not necessarily negative. Especially when a discussion of what is being done well or excellently precedes the critique of areas needing improvement.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to approve the things that are excellent, *“That you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ...”* [Phil. 1:10]. The context is a prayer and exhortation for spiritual growth to distinguish good doctrine from poor doctrine. The Greek term *deafero* means, “to differ.” By implication, it means to surpass, be better, differ from, be of more value, and be more excellent. The term was used in connection with testing metals. Paul urged the church to know the difference between good and bad and the difference between mediocre and excellent. Paul is a man who worked hard to live a life that was excellent for Jesus, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me”* [Phil. 3:12].

Solomon expressed a similar thought: “*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might...*” [Eccl. 9:10].

Excellence is an attitude and the attitude is displayed in the process. Excellence is not perfection. Excellence is not an achievement since we never arrive. Excellence tends to see obstacles as opportunities.

What is required for excellence?

1. Motivation: We should desire an attitude of wanting to work harder for the Lord than for any other relationship. When we serve God, we want to give Him our best. The Mosaic Law provides that an animal sacrifice had to be without blemish or imperfection. Imagine a shepherd with two lambs. One of the lambs is blind and has a broken leg and the other is excellent. It would not be difficult to imagine that the shepherd would want to offer the significantly less than perfect lamb as a sacrifice. Yet, God says it is unacceptable. He effectively tells us that if we love Him, then we want to give Him our best. The motivation to give God our best is not to impress people that we are excellent we desire to give Him our best because He is worthy and we love Him. It is love for God that should motivate us to excellence as we minister to Him and His people.

2. A standard: Excellence needs a goal. There must be a description of the standard. Since excellence raises the standard we need to determine how high the bar is to be raised. When is it good enough? We know that excellence is not perfection, but what is the standard? For example the Raiders football team says they have, “A Commitment to Excellence.” What does that mean? No team will have a perfect season. A team may go undefeated, but it will not be a perfect season as there will be countless plays in every game that could have been executed better. Perhaps the commitment to excellence relates to winning the Super Bowl, or maybe getting to go to the Super Bowl or even the playoffs. Once you have set a standard, you can work toward the standard. A simple reference to a grade scale where “C” is average, “B” is above average, and “A” represents excellent can be a helpful starting point. Asking the question, “What needs to change for this to move from a “C” to an “A”?” can be helpful.

3. Discipline: To become excellent, you need to work towards the standard. Athletes wake up early and train hard to improve their skills. They learn to avoid staying out too late and avoid certain excesses in order to be excellent. No one becomes excellent without self-control diligence and effort.

4. Discipleship: We need to be disciples of Jesus and learn from Him. But we also need to learn from others who have gleaned valuable lessons ahead of us. Excellence in ministry is learned from others and taught to others. Paul imparted the lessons that he had learned to Timothy, and instructed Timothy to commit those lessons to faithful people who would teach others also [2Tim. 2:2].

5. Accountability: We need to be accountable to other leaders and team members. We need to receive review from others. In this manner, we can better understand the effectiveness of our ministry. Sometimes we are reluctant to receive review because it will undoubtedly include criticism as well as affirmation. Yet failure to be accountable hinders excellence.

In my ministry and life I want to be excellent by giving God my best. **To excel in ministry** I try to focus my efforts in the areas where I tend to get the best results. My best for the kingdom generally relate to my roles as a teacher, and leadership development. So I try to concentrate my time where I have the most effective results. Generally wherever possible I delegate other functions to other people [they often do as good a job or better than I do]. To work towards excellence I'm intentional about activities and attitudes that help me grow and improve. In regard to teaching I receive critique after each message from capable teachers who are able to provide meaningful critique. This accountability helps me to improve every week. In my roles as a developer of leaders I regularly meet with various mentors, attend conferences, read books and articles, and seek to apply the lessons to improve.

To grow in life my primary areas of focus are marriage and family. I'm intentional to meet with my wife Karen every few months to receive feedback. I ask her, "How are you doing, and how can I be a better husband to you? How am I doing as a father? Where do you think we are doing well? What are some areas where I can grow as a husband and a father?" I try to incorporate her feedback and look to grow in the months that follow. After a few months we will talk again and I'll ask similar questions and also ask about the matters that we previously discussed. I want to know if things are the same better or worse. I also started meeting with our sons when they were teenagers to look for their take on how I was doing as a dad and how I could grow as a better father to them and for them. They are now young adults and I continue to have these discussions with them. I want to grow as a dad and represent Christ as excellently as possible to them (and my wife). Finally, I try to remember that excellence is an attitude, not a skill, and my primary motive to give God my best is simply a response to my understanding that He has given me His best [John 3:16].

Lifework:

- 1. Consider a leader or ministry that you consider to be excellent. What distinguishes them as being excellent?**
- 2. In your life and ministry what are some areas that you can celebrate as "B" or "A" level?**
- 3. In your life and ministry what are some areas that need improvement?**

4. If you do not currently have a mentor, list some potential mentors that you can approach for evaluation training and accountability. Plan to secure a mentor in the next thirty days.

Principle 5: Be Balanced

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man”
[Luke 2:52]

“Faith gives you an inner strength and a sense of balance and perspective in life.” – Gregory Peck

Balance is a condition in which different elements are in the correct proportions so that there is stability.

Jesus is the epitome of balance. I assume that Jesus is the only one who was perfectly balanced. The rest of us are out of balance as a result of sin and are seeking to attain balance in our lives. We are often aware of imbalance but don't make the necessary corrections towards balance. And of course there are instances where we are ignorant of our imbalance. Jesus is the model for how we want to live. Luke records Christ's human development and transition from boyhood to manhood with a summary statement, *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man”* [Luke 2:52]. In this brief summary, Luke identifies four spheres that need to be healthy and balanced in our lives: wisdom, stature, favor with God, and favor with man. There is a parallel with the four-sphere concept of the greatest commandment where we are told, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind”* [Deut. 6:5, Matt.22:37].

1. Stature [strength, the body sphere]: Moses observes that man's length of days is generally seventy years up to eighty years if you have strength [Psalms 90:10]. Not only are you reminded that your physical life is limited but you are also encouraged that by caring for health that your life can be more productive and enjoyed longer. Moses similarly observed the principle that obedience to God results in better health [Deut. 7:12-15].

Paul reminded young Timothy that bodily exercise profits a little compared to the eternal benefits of godliness [1Tim. 4:8]. The Greco-Roman world that dominated life and culture exalted the human form. The gymnasium was a center of life. Timothy undoubtedly was influenced by that culture and Paul was reminding his disciple not to put too much attention on his body since bodily exercise only provides a temporal benefit. Nevertheless, there is a benefit to exercise that should not be ignored. Fitness and strength impact your capacity to be productive and fulfill your calling. Some of the issues to consider include: regular medical check-ups, nutrition, exercise, predisposition to disease and abuse [e.g. drugs, alcohol].

2. Wisdom [the mind sphere]: Wisdom is the godly application of knowledge that is often gleaned by experience. When God offered King Solomon anything that the king would ask for Solomon requested wisdom to lead God's people. His request pleased God, because the tendency of man would be to seek long life, riches, or the destruction

of enemies. So God granted the request such that Solomon became the wisest man to walk the planet other than Jesus [1Ki. 3:5-12]. Solomon understood the value of wisdom.

James encourages us to seek wisdom from God in faith as God delights to impart wisdom liberally and without reproach [Ja. 1:5-7]. Thus growing in wisdom requires the pursuit of learning and risk to glean experiences to grow. A systematic intentional development of the intellect is necessary to effectively fulfill one's calling. Once you sense your calling in any particular season of life then obtain relevant information to prepare you for your calling. For example, in college the selection of your major helps to focus your studies and education. In your calling it is helpful to read about Christian disciples as a foundation. Learn about theology and understand Christian doctrine generally. If you discovered a call to leadership resources focused on leadership are needed. Similarly a call to foreign missions would likely trigger a greater need and desire to read biographies of missionaries and learn about foreign missions generally.

Ask, what do I need to know for the life that God desires for me? *Acquire* knowledge by being educated in the subject(s). *Apply* what you learn to grow. *Accountability* in your life provides confirmation that you are growing in wisdom as you stimulate the intellect and incorporate the lessons learned.

3. Favor with man [the soul sphere, personal relationships]: The most important command is to love God with all that we are, and the second greatest command is to love others as you love yourself [Matt. 22:34-40]. The soul is the connection point for relationship with others. Consider the following list of seven key healthy relational traits:

- a. Compassion [Eph. 4:32] is the response to the suffering of others that motivates a desire to help.
- b. Availability [Gal. 6:1] relates to serving others because you value them.
- c. Forgiveness [Col. 3:13] allows you to move forward in relationships because you have no yearning to avenge past wrongs.
- d. Encouragement [1Th. 5:11] instills others with hope and determination to act beyond their fears and sense of inadequacy to do what God has called them to.
- e. Honor [Rom. 12:10] affirms and applauds those who do well while resisting the temptation to seek accolades for self.
- f. Acceptance [Rom. 15:7] is the ability to receive value and harmonize with others who are different. You can accept people without affirming or approving of behaviors or attitudes that are beyond God's boundaries.
- g. Humility [Matt. 11:29] is the capacity to defer to another's needs or authority instead of demanding preference for self.

4. Favor with God [the spirit sphere, relationship with God]: Spiritual maturity is more than following rules. A mature relationship with God is more than one-dimensional [e.g. prayer, Bible, or service]. It is characterized by love that is demonstrated by actions of obedience, attitudes of dependence, and the development of Christ-like character

[Gal. 5:22-23]. It is associated with increased faith in God, understanding of God and experience with God.

Finding balance: We have a few Christmas traditions in our home. We generally eat Chinese food on Christmas Eve and open a present. When the kids were smaller we all got new pajamas (and no they didn't match). On Christmas Day we open all the Christmas cards together and thank God for loved ones. We read the account of Christ's birth and early years from Luke 2. Now that our sons are grown we each read a paragraph and talk about what it means. And we finish at Lu. 2:52 and look for balance.

We look at the four spheres described above and do some self-examination. How am I doing in each sphere? We rank where we are strongest to weakest. We share with one another for accountability and confirmation. Then we consider how we would like to change in the coming year to attain better balance. For example, I have found that my strongest spheres are my relationship with God and the mind/intellect sphere. I have had seasons that were so busy that I neglected my health and did not make as much time for relationships as I wanted. So I looked to make adjustments like seeking to get together with a friend or friends at least once a week to enhance the relationship sphere. In the body sphere, I still don't eat a very healthy diet and I don't get as much rest as I likely need, but I have started riding a bicycle regularly as a way improve in this sphere and resting more. I personally like to review on a quarterly basis to see how balanced I feel. I'll also ask for feedback from my wife and some other friends to get their sense. Then I'll try to adjust as needed.

Although I've never considered Gregory Peck a great theologian (although I loved his character in the movie "To Kill a Mockingbird") I wholeheartedly agree with his observation, "Faith gives you an inner strength and a sense of balance and perspective in life." Ultimately it is our faith in Christ that will give us perspective and guide us towards balance in life.

Lifework:

- 1. Look at the four spheres and do some self-examination. How are you doing in each sphere? Rank where you are strongest to weakest.**
- 2. Consider how you would like to change in the coming year to attain better balance.**
- 3. Share with another for accountability and confirmation. Also consider asking for feedback from your spouse and/or some other friends to get their sense. Then try to adjust the review and balance as needed.**
- 4. Schedule a reevaluation of your balance and put the date in your calendar. I recommend a review annually or every six months or quarterly.**

Principle 6: Be About Your Father's Business

“And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” [Luke 2:49]

“Know your calling and do it!” – Bob Shank

When Jesus was twelve years old he was preparing to assume His responsibility as a man, a rite of passage as a son of the covenant, and His role in the family business. As Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem to return home to the Galilee they were unaware that Jesus had remained in Jerusalem [Luke 2:41-49]. They found Jesus among the teachers at the temple listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard marveled at His understanding and answers. Mary admonished Jesus, *“Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”*

Jesus respectfully reminded His mother that Joseph was not His Father, and His destiny required that He be about His Father’s business. In addition He proposes that Joseph and Mary should not be surprised or worried since it would only be natural for any boy to assume his role in the family business. In this season of His life, Jesus career, if you will, was as a carpenter or stonemason. But Jesus was also aware at a very early age of His kingdom calling.

Many people I know struggle to discern their calling in various seasons of life. Many get a sense of a calling in the marriage and family realm. And many get a sense of a calling in the career realm. But too many people have no idea of a sense of calling in the kingdom realm. The calling realm is a sphere of life where people seek to advance God’s kingdom apart from the marriage, family, and marketplace realms.

What is your Father’s business? Followers of Christ are called to advance the kingdom, proclaim the gospel, know Christ and make Him known. When you know your calling and do it you are effective in the Father’s business.

How do you know (discover) your kingdom calling? You’ll discover that your calling is likely the convergence of three factors: passion, performance and promotion of the kingdom.

1. Passion: What are you passionate about? What are the issues or who are the people that make you wake up early in the morning or stay up late at night thinking? What brings laughter or tears? For example, one person may be moved by the plight of orphans, another widows, and yet another youth. Someone is passionate about prayer, and another laments the abuse of those oppressed by sex trafficking. Some are zealous to support a pregnancy center where the gospel is proclaimed and others want to see

young moms mentored by mature godly women. There are tireless advocates who reach the next generation and make disciples. The key is to figure out what moves you. There are countless issues people and needs that God desires to minister to. Trust that God will direct you as you begin to contemplate what you are passionate about. Also consider where that ministry or calling is likely to take place. A great deal of ministry takes place in the local church. Some ministries, like children's church, are ideally suited to take place in the local church. Other ministry such as a pregnancy center are best suited alongside, but outside of the local church, and some are a hybrid. Trying to discern what you are passionate about is often the first step to discern your calling.

2. Performance: What activities produce your best results? Your calling will generally maximize your gifting. Each of us has areas where we tend to get great results without having to expend significantly greater energy. As a student there is the experience of getting "A" grades in classes in certain subjects without having to strain to study. On the other hand there are other subjects where you struggle and study seemingly forever only to get a "C." The type of results and the amount of effort and energy required to produce the results help you to discover your calling. For example, I can play the drums, and like to play (passion). When our church was young I played drums on the worship team. Yet it would take me hours to learn new rhythms and then the performance would be C level. Fortunately, God graciously brought called drummers to the church, people who have the ability to learn complex rhythms quickly and play proficiently. In this example, I played drums for a while but that was not likely my true calling for that season since that was not the best use of my gifts. On the other hand, in areas like Bible teaching and leadership development I get much better results with less effort. The areas where you are most effective will help you discover your calling.

3. Promotion of the kingdom: Your calling must advance God's kingdom. This third sphere of advancing God's kingdom may be readily apparent in certain areas typically associated with the activity of the church. For example if you are zealous to share your faith (passion), and see effective results because the gospel is proclaimed (performance) it is easy to connect evangelism and promotion of the kingdom. There are countless ministries and activities that are undertaken in the church and alongside the church in para-church organizations where people can discover and walk in their calling.

In addition, I'd like to encourage you that your calling may not fit in any of these traditional slots, but it can still be what God has called you to. For example, you love photography and are a very gifted photographer (passion and performance), but you don't initially see a connection between photography and the kingdom. As you seek to discern God's will you have the vision to start a photography class at the church for people to learn about photography, and with the plan that people in the class are going to be encouraged to chronicle life in their community. The best images will be displayed on a link to the church website. Finally, there will be a fundraiser event where people will purchase the images and the proceeds will be sent to support foreign missions that

advance the gospel and are part of the local church's outreach. Now you see the connection to advancing the kingdom and the convergence of passion performance and promotion of the kingdom.

How do you fulfill (do) your calling? Your calling may change in different seasons of your life. But in every season of your life you must be about Your Father's business. Accepting your responsibility and doing your part in the "family business" it is a rite of passage that reflects maturity as a follower of Christ. Simply stated **if you are a follower of Christ, you must be about your Father's business.**

You need to prepare for life and calling: Too many followers of Christ will spend 25-35+ years of their most productive life so focused on their career that they neglect their calling. Many plan to begin to discover their calling and fulfill it after they retire or after the kids have left the nest. Unfortunately many of these people feel too tired at that point to begin their entry into the Father's business. They are unprepared for life and calling. The time constraints of career marriage and family are real and relevant but they should not keep us from being about the Father's business.

Adjusting priorities: Being consumed with career and family obligations are like a pendulum that is swung to one extreme end. The answer is generally not to swing the pendulum to the other extreme. In other words, the answer is rarely quit working and quit family responsibilities and serve God. The answer is generally adjusting the pendulum towards balance. You need to seek balance and margin in your life to discover and do what you are called to in the Father's kingdom. For example, you may look at your life in this season and conclude that you can devote two to four hours a week to the Father's business. Once you've made that assessment then you can devote that time to your calling in this season. You can continue to use this approach in varying seasons of life and ministry.

Many people will sense they are called to an existing area of ministry either in or alongside the local church. They align themselves with areas they are passionate about and use their gifts with others who have a common passion and complimentary gifts to advance the gospel. By dedicating time to fulfill your calling you begin to experience the satisfaction of advancing the kingdom and impacting eternity. Other people are entrepreneurial leaders who will change the status quo by fulfilling their calling by creating new areas to advance the kingdom. Regardless of what you are called to there shall be no other contentment like experiencing the fulfillment of being about your Father's business. It is time for all of us to accept this role and rite of passage, and rejoice in advancing the Father's business together. Know your calling and do it!

Lifework:

1. What are you passionate about?

2. What activities produce your best results?

3. How do you believe that your perceived calling advances God's kingdom?

4. How do you plan to fulfill your calling? What adjustments will you make?

Principle 7: Be a Dreamer

“One night Joseph had a dream and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him more than ever” [Gen. 37:5]

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” – Harriett Tubman

To dream is to live. Dreams can be literal experiences during our sleep and also a metaphor for aspirations, the hope or ambition of achieving something. Every great dream begins with God and is imparted to a dreamer. Joseph had two God-inspired literal dreams recorded in Genesis 37. The symbols revealed to Joseph and others that he would exercise authority over his older brothers and even his parents. In effect they were God-inspired dreams of greatness. Joseph's brothers hated him even more because of those dreams. They already despised the fact that their father had a special fondness for Joseph, and now their little brother was intimating that God was going to give him prominence in the family. Perhaps they were offended by the way Joseph communicated the dream(s) with a proud and disrespectful tone. Yet regardless of Joseph's tone, or yours, dreamers provoke others.

The provocative nature of dreams: a God-inspired dream (aspiration) is the essence of vision. All truly effective leaders are visionaries. In the kingdom we distinguish man's good ideas that may be beneficial and provide a basis for positive change from a God-inspired idea or vision that provides hope in an attractive future that will glorify God. God-inspired dreams or vision will provoke other people to change the status quo to reach for something good and better. This is the hallmark of leadership – the ability to mobilize people to change the status quo. Managers tend to focus on maintaining or improving the status quo, but leaders seek to change it. That provocative aspect of dreams and leadership is often very attractive to some who will likely follow. And often provokes others to oppose. Because leaders with dreams seek to change the status quo they can threaten those who have been successful (exalted) in a prior season. So dreamers should be prepared to provoke and expect that the reactions will be both positive and negative.

The testing nature of dreams: God-inspired dreams often take time to become God-inspired realities. During that season the dream and the leader are tested. The psalmist observes, *“Until the time came to fulfill his dreams the Lord tested Joseph's character.”* [Ps. 105:19] [NLT]. Joseph was being prepared by God and tested until the dreams were fulfilled (more than twenty years later). Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery and was later falsely accused and imprisoned. While in prison, the people who could free Joseph neglected him, but God had not neglected him. Leaders and dreamers generally discover sooner rather than later that they need God's strength patience and passion in order to experience the fulfillment of the dream. Joseph

ultimately connects the struggles and hardships he experienced and the fulfillment of the dream as God's divine plan, *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."* [Gen. 50:20]. Nevertheless I assume that during those difficult years while Joseph's character was being forged and tested he likely wondered on more than one occasion whether the dream was in fact God inspired.

Joseph had a dream that revealed he would be exalted, and his brothers would bow down before him. The purpose of the fulfillment was not to make Joseph great, but to reveal the greatness of God, His glory, and to save many lives through Joseph's God inspired leadership. The more that a leader has dreams of personal greatness and seeks to attain personal glory the more the leader will have to wrestle with the issue of whether God inspired the dream in the first place. On the other hand, the more the leader is pursuing the dream for God's glory and greatness and to serve others the more likely the leader will have confidence in the source of the dream. Dreams test (and forge) our character. So dreamers should be prepared to be tested, but don't let a God-inspired dream die prematurely because dreams give life.

The life giving nature of dreams: Joseph found the fulfillment of his dream as God used Joseph to administer a fourteen-year plan to save countless lives during a seven-year famine. Dreams can give life in another way. When people stop having dreams and aspirations they start to slowly die in the sense that they no longer have anything to live for or to motivate them or others they influence. Dreams can expire in a few ways. First, they become impossible. I've finally come to grips with the notion that the Dodgers are not going to offer me a tryout. At this stage in my life it simply isn't going to happen. Second, dreams expire when they become fulfilled. For example my dream to be married to a godly woman is my reality. The dream is fulfilled (I'm living the dream). Third, dreams expire when you sacrifice your dream so that another person's dream can be fulfilled. Imagine a couple that lives in a suburban area. He has dreamed of living in the suburbs and she aspires to live in the big city. They never sensed God truly direct them to the suburbs nor have they sensed Him direct them from the suburb to the city. Nevertheless, he is willing to let his dream die so that hers can be their reality.

When a dream expires it must be replaced by other dreams or you start to die (metaphorically speaking). Typically, people can identify their dreams in the following spheres: marriage, family, career, calling, and personal. Try to consider your dreams in this season of your life both short-term and long term. Some of those dreams or desires will have a sense that they are God-inspired and others perhaps not as much. Regardless of whether you feel they are likely of God or your not sure record them, because dreams give life and inspire.

The inspiring nature of dreams: those who receive God's imparted vision and are moved to lead are undoubtedly inspired, as are those who follow these dreamers. In addition, these visionary leaders also inspire others that their dreams or aspirations

might also be from God. Remember that Joseph not only received dreams from God, but God had blessed him to interpret the dreams that God had given to Pharaoh (and those who served him). God had given the Egyptian leader two dreams with the same message but neither the Pharaoh nor his advisors were able to interpret the message. Joseph understood that the dreams were from God and that the message was that there would be seven abundant years in Egypt followed by seven years of famine. Joseph encouraged the Pharaoh to appreciate that his dreams were inspired or imparted by the true and living God [Gen. 41]. And God inspired dreams should motivate us to communicate and implement a vision to see the dream come to pass.

The communication and implementation of the vision to fulfill the dream: God inspired Joseph with a vision or plan to spare lives during the famine [Gen. 41:33-41]. During the seven abundant years twenty percent of the harvest would be gathered in reserve for the famine. During the famine people would be able to buy grain from the Pharaoh's reserves. Pharaoh recognized the wisdom of the plan and also recognized that the God of Israel had inspired the vision. So Joseph was promoted to second in command in Egypt. Now Joseph had to communicate and implement the plan. His plan would not be fully realized for fourteen years. Furthermore it would be over twenty years from the time Joseph dreamed of his brothers bowing down before him before it would actually be fulfilled. Once the vision is received there is generally much work to do to make the dream a reality.

Receiving the vision is the first step. Every year I seek God's direction as I start to "dream out loud." I think about my desires and aspirations in my marriage, our family, my calling (for me my calling and career have converged as I'm presently involved in full-time vocational ministry), and for me personally. I generally carve out as much time as possible to seek God's direction through prayer and His word to discern what he wants to do differently in my life and the ministries where I have oversight or influence. I make notes and try to continue to wrestle with God until I have a sense that I have received His vision. In our local church every ministry leader is responsible to seek God's vision for that ministry on an annual basis.

Communicating the vision is the second step. Those who will follow the dream need to know what the vision is. The dreamer needs to show others where they are going. The leader needs to describe the desired destination and help others to not only understand this attractive future but to perceive how to get there. The vision can be communicated through a variety of mediums, and it needs to be communicated repeatedly. Help people to understand the benefits they will likely experience by implementing the plan, and that the benefits outweigh any burdens.

In our local church each ministry leader prepares a vision statement for their ministry describing their objective(s) (where they are going) and the methods (how they plan to get there). Similarly, I share with my wife and sons the aspirations that I have for our marriage and family, and encourage them to share their dreams with me. Once you

share a dream in the marriage, family, career, or calling sphere other people will generally respond in one of three ways. They will either want to engage in the vision with you, or offer to support you but not personally participate, or express opposition. Leaders are seeking buy-in (participation) as an ideal rather than merely permission (passive support) and sometimes participation results from better as well as repeated communication. In regard to opposition continue to communicate to help opponents better understand however don't focus your efforts on the opponents. Instead develop a coalition of the willing who will positively influence the opposition.

Implementing the vision is the third step. The steps or methods to move from where you are to where God is leading should be described in such a way that they are SMART [specific, measurable, accountable, reasonable, and time specific]. Consider your current situation and the resources available to you, and the obstacles to the desired destination. Then begin to develop the plan to get from here to there laying out SMART steps; and frequently review the status of the implementation of the plan. What progress has been made, what adjustments need to be made and how will we keep moving forward to God's desired destination?

Finally, be a dreamer because the kingdom needs dreamers and to dream is to live.

Lifework:

- 1. What are some of your dreams (aspirations) in the marriage, family, career and personal realms?**
- 2. What are some of your dreams (aspirations) in the calling realm? Why do you believe the dreams are from God?**
- 3. Take time to communicate the dream(s) regarding your calling. Consider how to communicate your dreams more effectively.**
- 4. How will you implement the dream(s)?**

Principle 8: Be Humble

“Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” [Matt. 11:29 NLT]

“True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” – C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

D.L. Moody observed, “There is no harder lesson for man to learn than the lesson of humility. It is the rarest of all the gifts.” Success in life and ministry is a catalyst for pride. Success feeds the beast of the flesh like a strong narcotic and is addicting and arguably far more dangerous than failure could ever be. Success fuels a greater desire for power, influence, authority, and self-reliance that must be broken before the man or woman of God will truly be fit for kingdom service.

Jesus’ only truly autobiographical statement was that he was humble and gentle at heart. He urged us to take His yoke upon us and learn from Him. The agrarian image of a team of oxen pulling a plow as the yoke was placed upon their shoulders was familiar to his audience. So was the nuance of an experienced ox with the plow fitted to his shoulders carrying the burden as an inexperienced ox walked alongside. The yoke was also a symbol of submission. We need to learn of Jesus and from Jesus to become humble. We need to take His yoke upon us, and when we do we discover a wonderful blessing. There are countless lessons to learn from Jesus, but here are some that I try focus on.

Learn from Jesus to trust God to exalt in due season: At the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry he resisted the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Jesus resisted the temptation of seeking his own pleasure before the needs of others or contrary to God, the temptation of self-exaltation, and the temptation for power and influence apart from the cross [Matt. 4:1-11]. At the end of Jesus’ ministry He affirmed that all that He did was to glorify the Father, and now He confidently expected that Father would exalt Him [Jn. 17:1-5]. Jesus’ values are often completely contrary to the values of the flesh and the world. The world seeks power, authority, position, fame, and greatness for self. In contrast, those who follow Jesus acquire influence (greatness) in the kingdom by sacrificial service to others for the glory of God. Jesus declared that He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many [Matt. 20:25-28]. **There is nothing wrong with a desire to do great things for God, but the motive must be God’s glory and the means sacrificial service.** Jesus never strives for acclaim or exaltation in this world. Jesus knew and trusted that His Father would exalt Him in due season as he humbly submitted His life.

Each of us as followers of Christ and leaders has flirted with the desire for self-glory. Each of us has wrestled with the problems of pride and pursuit of prominence. We are loath to admit it and we are generally skilled at affirming, “All glory to God.” Like Jesus I

need to resist the temptation to exalt myself, choose to glorify the Father (and not myself), and sacrificially serve others. I need to remember and trust that God will exalt in due season whether in this life or the life that is to come. Whenever I look to some success that is connected with my labor and start to think, "I've accomplished something" it is a yellow warning flag to me. Pride is arguably the most dangerous of sins for it breeds self-reliance and exaltation. God has promised that as I humble myself I can trust that He will exalt in due season as promised [1Pet. 5:6]. So there is no need to seek self-glory. Instead, I can choose to be content to humbly sacrificially serve others for God's glory without any yearning for self-glory.

Learn from Jesus to submit and depend on God: The yoke was a symbol of submission. Jesus taught His disciples to pray *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* One could reasonably argue that the focus of the Model Prayer, the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew's Gospel is the establishment of God's kingdom. In the present stage of the kingdom, the church age, God's will is accomplished and His kingdom advanced as we willingly submit to Him. Jesus modeled this submission in the Garden of Gethsemane [Matt. 26:39-44]. Three times Jesus prayed for the cup of suffering associated with the cross and taking our sin upon Himself to pass, and three times He prayed, *"Not my will but your will be done."*

Jesus not only modeled submission to His Father but dependence upon God as He prayed. Through prayer Jesus manifest to us our need to depend on God. Jesus exhorted Peter and us, *"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* Here we learn the plan to submit and depend as well as the danger of failing to do so. We must be spiritually alert (watch) and in intimate community with God (pray) or we will fall into temptation. What is the temptation? We tend to think of particular issues like sexual sin or drunkenness, but I believe the temptation is to deny Jesus [e.g. Peter]. Not simply the idea of denying that we are followers of Christ, but denying His rightful position as our Lord. Jesus declares that our strength (flesh) is inadequate to overcome this temptation. Thus I need to choose to humbly submit to God's will and recognize my dependence upon Him for strength to overcome.

There is a danger of both success and failure causing leaders to flee Christ's yoke and to rebel. When we have experienced success we tend to become self-reliant and thus neglect God's strength assuming the sufficiency of our own. On the other hand, when we have failed in life or ministry we can become discouraged and feel unworthy of our role in the kingdom. Like Peter after his denial of Jesus we can flee from Christ, and remove ourselves from the Lord's service until He graciously restores us [Jn. 21:15-17]. Perceived successes or failures should be a catalyst to encourage us to see our need to submit and depend on God. I am keenly aware that despite more than a quarter of a century in service to Christ that I'm prone to wander unless I actively and regularly choose to submit to and depend upon God.

Learn from Jesus to esteem others: Paul exhorted that we are to have the same attitude as Jesus. Nothing should be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility let each esteem others better than himself. We are to look out not only for our own interests, but also the interests of others [Phil. 2:3-5]. There is no place in the kingdom for selfish ambitions that reflect pride. The antidote is humility that is demonstrated by regarding others and their interests as significant or greater than myself. Jesus is the ultimate example, who despite being God humbled Himself and came as a man to serve others. In humble obedience to the Father's will He went to the cross for our sin [Phil. 2:5-8].

When I begin to fully appreciate that God does not need me, in the sense that He can accomplish His will without me, I begin to discover the reality of the privilege of serving God by serving others. That ministry is not in any way a platform for my ego or selfish ambitions. That I must humble myself crucify my conceit, and seek to care more about the needs of others. Too many leaders in the Church are frustrated that the followers are not following the leader's agenda. The leaders' frustrations would likely be significantly reduced if the leader sought to esteem the followers and sought to look out for the followers' interests rather than striving for their own agenda. So, whenever I'm frustrated I sense a warning that I'm not being humble and that I need to esteem and care for others.

Learn rest for your soul: Jesus promised that when you take His yoke and learn from Him that you will find rest for your soul. The Hebrew audience that He spoke to understood the concept of rest or shalom to be more than peace or an absence of worry, but also a sense of contentment, satisfaction or wholeness. When I take Jesus' yoke I'm acknowledging that He will do the heavy lifting. Thus if I'm constantly feeling heavy-laden worrying about carrying the load perhaps I'm not taking His yoke and letting Jesus do the heavy lifting. Or I'm seeking to carry a load that Jesus has not called me to carry. Similarly, when I've taken His yoke I must walk alongside Jesus. It reminds me that when I'm trying to push the plow ahead, faster than Jesus has allowed, that I'm not taking His yoke upon me. Also when I take His yoke upon me, I can be assured that He will get the plow (the work) to the desired destination. When I turn to the left or the right to change the course and the Lord doesn't approve the course deviation I can be frustrated until I remember that it is His yoke His direction and His work.

When I choose to be humble and trust God to exalt, submit and depend on Him, seek His glory and seek to esteem others than I discover rest for my soul. It has never been about what I have to do, but it has always been about what Jesus has done for me. It has never been about me having to earn God's love by what I do, but it has always been about receiving God's love through Jesus. So when I humble myself and take His yoke and learn from Jesus I think of Him and others more, and myself less. And I've discovered the wonderful blessing of *shalom* for my soul.

Lifework:

- 1. Why are pride and desire for glory dangerous to Christian leaders?**
- 2. How do perceived successes or failures make it difficult to submit and depend on God?**
- 3. How can frustration in ministry be related to a lack of humility?**
- 4. How has humility been related to rest for your soul in your life and ministry?**