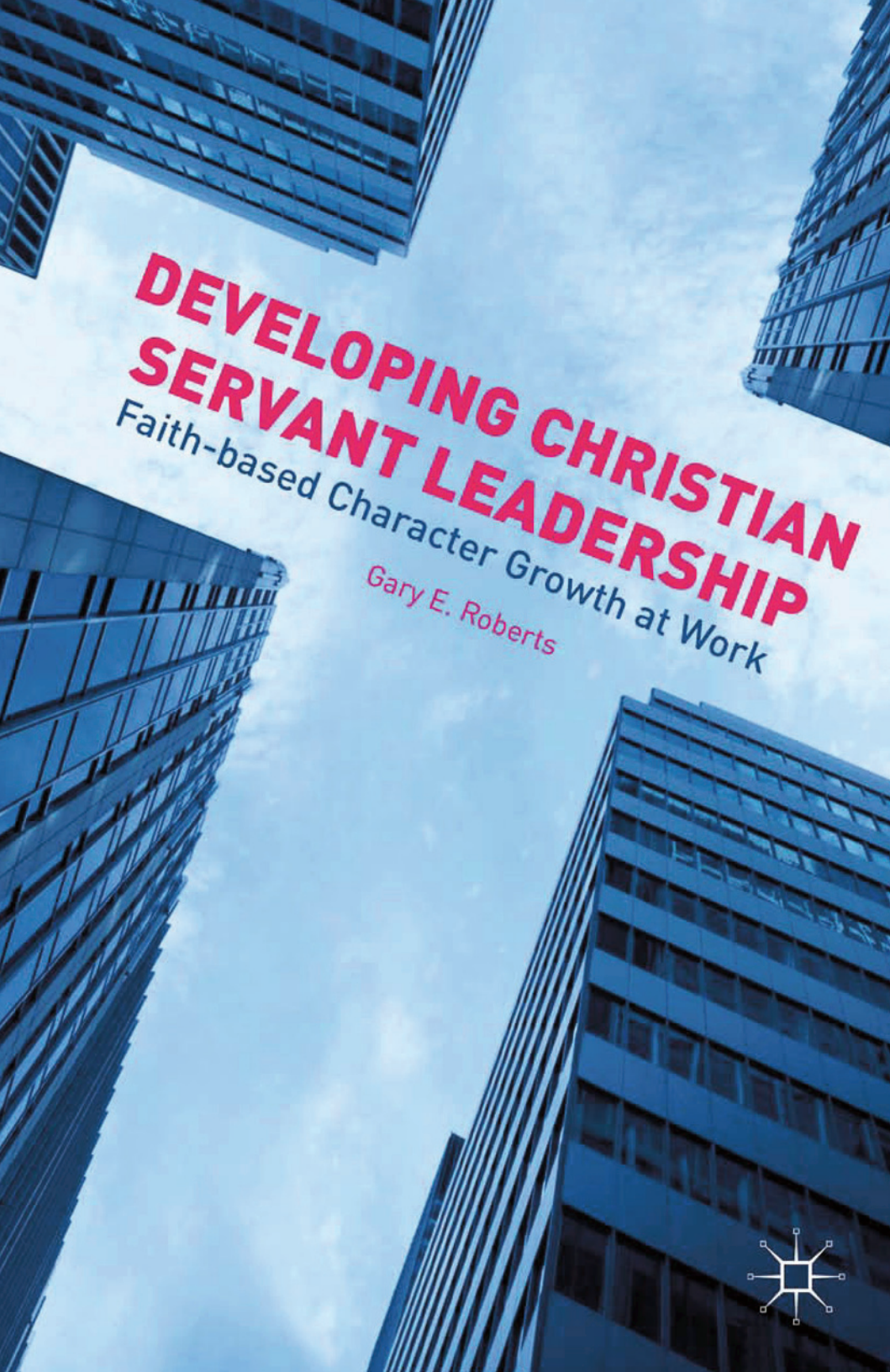


A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of several modern skyscrapers with glass facades, reaching towards a bright blue sky with light, wispy clouds. The perspective creates a sense of height and grandeur.

DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Faith-based Character Growth at Work

Gary E. Roberts



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SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN
SERVANT LEADERSHIP
FAITH-BASED CHARACTER
GROWTH AT WORK

Gary E. Roberts

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DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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To my Lord and savior Jesus Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith and the foundation of this book. I thank my wonderful wife Connie, my beloved mother Joyce, sister Sharon, and my precious daughters Alyssa, Sandra, and Christin for their love and support. I dedicate this to my students and colleagues at Regent University with gratitude and humility.

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the fruit of my role as a professor at Regent University, instructing gifted and spirit-filled men and women in graduate level government, public administration, and business courses. The Holy Spirit is the author of all God-breathed inspiration, and I give the glory and praise to God for the fruit produced by teaching spirit-filled students. This book is a collection of weekly devotionals that are an important “labor of love,” promoting reflection in the faith integration process. The goal is to illustrate critical biblical character attributes that servant leaders need to develop in various life domains, but with a primary emphasis on the workplace. They reflect much of my own trials and tribulations as I “work out my salvation with fear and trembling” and share the encouragement and discipline I received from the Lord. These devotionals are self-contained and stand on their own merits. It was only after I achieved a “critical mass” that I recognized the value of assembling them into a collection for a wider audience. Hence, the reader can confidently read the entries in the order presented, or feel free to review the individual topic areas of interest. I have included discussion questions after each devotional to stimulate further reflection and growth.

I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for this amazing gift of instructing students at a faith-based institution. I thank the administration of Regent University, including Chancellor Dr. Robertson, for his faithfulness in hearing the Lord and obeying his instructions. The fruit is a growing and influential university, producing Christian leaders to change the world. I am indebted as well to Dr. Barry Ryan, former Vice President for Academic Affairs, for hiring me and helping birth this great journey. A special thanks to my Regent School of Government, School of Business and Leadership colleagues and staff members who are wonderful men and women of the Lord who supported me faithfully over the years. Students are clearly the focus of the book: they inspire and humble me with their passion, gifts, and abilities. Finally, I want to thank my wonderful mother Joyce, beautiful wife Connie and our three wonderful daughters, Alyssa, Sandra, and Christin for their patience and love. They are truly gifts from God!

CHAPTER 1



THE DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN SERVANT LEADER CHARACTER

This book is dedicated to assisting Christian leaders and managers to assume the mantle of servant leadership, the God-directed and God-endorsed means for achieving the foundational mission requirements of Christianity, the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Servant leadership is the approach to leadership promoted by Scripture, and it provides the greatest opportunity to honor God and bless our employers. There are many approaches to leadership, but only servant leadership emphasizes the necessary balance between morality, mission achievement, and promoting the best interests of the key stakeholders (employees, clients, customers, and the community). The dual foundation of servant leadership is stewardship (which is achieving the mission by using moral motives, means, and ends) and servanthood (which is promoting the best interests and needs of the key stakeholders). Servant leadership manifests both religious and secular roots. There is a burgeoning body of literature that demonstrates the positive influence of servant leadership on a host of attitudinal, behavioral, and performance outcomes. One key element of the discussion is to rebut the varied and conflictual stereotypes and misinformation regarding servant leadership. Two of the most common are that servant leadership is “soft” management or that servant leaders possess a martyr complex. Servant leadership is love-based, but entails a 360-degree version of love that incorporates grace and accountability, forgiveness and discipline, and autonomy and clear boundaries. One cannot be a servant leader and not achieve the mission and discipline the workforce. Secondly, servant leaders are not martyrs; they actively promote self-care and work-life

harmony and balance. In the pages to come, we will more fully define servant leadership in its full balance and harmony.

By definition, servant leaders require Christian servant leader character. What is Christian servant leader character? It is the holistic harmony of moral motives, thoughts, and behaviors produced by a life surrendered to and led by the Holy Spirit, thereby cultivating the attributes and life of Christ. It is the foundation for enduring success in pleasing the Lord. Success without character is akin to a great house built upon a flawed foundation. Eventually the house collapses or is condemned, given the structural deficiencies. The cultivation of Christian servant leader character is a true labor of love that requires a lifetime of grace, patience, and sacrifice. Christian servant leader character recognizes the foundational role of faith, as we cannot please God unless we are truly “walking by faith, not by sight.” The way that we demonstrate Christian servant leader character and our love of Christ is by our obedience to his commandments, which is the basis for demonstrating the authenticity of our embrace. We must make the conscious and deliberate decision to consecrate our lives to the Lord through willful acts of obedience to biblical moral principles and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This entails a measured and sustained integration and application of moral motives, means, and ends as the foundation for our reasoning, decisions, and behavior. One of the main fruits of Christian servant leader character is godly wisdom based upon Spirit-led harmony and integrity.

In order to realize growth as a Christian servant leader, we need to engage in an ongoing introspection and self-analysis of our motives, means, and ends supported by the insights, wisdom, and coaching of those that we serve. We need to be able to ask the difficult questions concerning the true nature of our motives and possess the courage to penetrate self-deception and the inherent bias to disguise, rationalize, and externalize the truth. The only means to accomplish this lofty goal is to embrace a higher power, that of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can overcome the sin and deception of the human heart. Only the Holy Spirit can provide the accurate lenses through which to see ourselves in the appropriate condition, as God views us. Hence, when we engage in introspection, we must earnestly pray before, during, and after in order to see beyond the surface of our inner mental landscape and receive the spiritual “infrared goggles” to peer inside its dark corners and rooms. The goal is to see the inner and outer world through the eyes of God, seeing him as he really is, thus enabling us to see ourselves and others as we are. The gift of accurate lenses, balanced with accurate “weights and measures,” enables us to serve God and

others with a greater degree of integrity and effectiveness. The accurate lenses provide the ability to resist fear, pride, and complacency—the great enemies of our faith. The development of accurate lenses requires time and patience, and there is always a degree of error.

One of our greatest temptations is to compartmentalize our Christian faith between the sacred and the secular, resulting in moral hypocrisy. In essence, the character-building process is a holistic, united, and integrated commitment to God-honoring obedience in all life areas. This book focuses primarily on the workplace, but each section includes examples from and applications to other settings. Hence, we must “work out our salvation with fear and trembling,” with a moral unity only made possible by the dying of our flesh in every situation. The first step in the character development journey is a genuine conversion of the heart, in which Jesus becomes our Lord and Savior with a genuine commitment from us to “die to the self.” It is important to grasp the humbling breadth and depth of the challenge in order to possess the requisite level of humility.

GOD’S DEFINITION OF CHARACTER SUCCESS

The foundational principle for character success as a Christian servant leader begins with seeking, accepting, and embracing God’s definition of success for your life, which is always an incarnation of his redeeming love to the world. In essence, success is achieving your unique calling and purpose in God. This requires self-surrender, courage, humility, and accepting life experiences and outcomes that conflict with your own and the world’s definition of success. Once we understand our purpose and direction, we must utilize God’s grace and love to be a “hearer and doer” in order to complete our mission to the best of our ability, trusting in God for the outcome. In essence, this is a lifelong sanctification process as we grow in Christ’s likeness by learning to love God and others unconditionally, as he loves us unconditionally. Below is a seven-component model of the elements of Christian servant leader character. The foundational elements include:

1. *Practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, and small group fellowship.* Let us address these sequentially. Prayer is the ongoing intentional communication and conversation with God through a variety of forms, throughout our day. This entails daily intercessory prayer at a regular time and ongoing informal prayers as led by the Holy Spirit and circumstances. We cannot begin to understand, gain, and practice

Christian servant leader character without an ongoing commitment to a dynamic and vital relationship with the Lord. The difficult and nuanced moral decisions that we all must make require the Lord's guidance through prayer. The next element is a mature understanding of God's Word and the associated principles through the systematic reading and study of the Bible. Understanding increases through a combination of individual reading and the tutelage of our pastors and mentors, who help us develop a balanced exegetical and hermeneutical understanding. Reading of Scripture in isolation increases our vulnerability to deceptive and inaccurate interpretations. Church attendance is another critical element of our growth in knowledge and learning to love each other in a relationship. Finally, Christian fellowship in the context of a small group is essential to living the Christian faith and obtaining the support and encouragement to love and live as Christ did.

2. *Knowledge*. Knowledge is the ongoing growth process of gaining a "heart and mind" familiarity, awareness, and understanding of biblical moral principles ("My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," Hosea 4:6 [all Scripture is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV, unless noted]). Understanding is clearly captured by Psalm 119:34: "Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart." Knowledge is primarily cultivated through the active pursuit of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, and small group fellowship. However, one of the key elements of Christian servant leader character resides in the practice of humility regarding knowledge. Knowledge divorced from a humble heart "puffeth up," leading to arrogance, complacency, and overconfidence. The Holy Spirit reinforces a powerful truth: the more knowledge we accumulate, the greater our accountability for its application along with a higher intensity of spiritual warfare to impede our ability to apply what we learn. Even with God's power, support, and guidance, there will always be a gulf between what we know and our ability to consistently apply and live it out, given our sin nature; hence, the only rational response is modesty and meekness of spirit.
3. *Belief*. Belief is a free-will agreement regarding the legitimacy and efficacy of biblical moral principles. However, knowledge and belief, while necessary, are not a sufficient condition. "Even the demons believe" in God (James 2:19), but they refuse to obey, illustrating that intellectual agreement is not enough. Another example relates to forgiveness. We may know that forgiveness reduces anger and dysfunctional stress and believe that it produces beneficial health

- and spiritual effects, but given the intensity and power of the negative, emotions tend to choose the spirit of revenge over obedience.
4. *Motive.* The motive for our actions is the foundational element of moral character. Vain and sinful motives can give birth to grand and noble actions in the eyes of the world, and vice versa. The foundational biblical moral motivational principle is the integration of love into all life domains (1 Corinthians 13). One of the greatest character challenges is cultivating the desire and practice of discovering the true impetus and nature of our motives through ongoing and spirit-led prayer and self-awareness analysis. This struggle reflects the continuing, powerful nature of self-deception regarding areas of sin and weakness, in conjunction with spiritual warfare strategies of the demonic realm that accentuate the short-term costs and minimize the benefits of failing to address the true root cause of our problems and motives.
 5. *Godly Means.* Ideally our behavior should possess deontological and teleological integrity (means). Godly character requires that for an action to be moral and ethical, it should meet the dual standards of conformance with the “letter and spirit” of biblical principles (deontological or principle-based integrity) and promote the greater good of the persons involved (self and others, teleological integrity). The means employed to reach a goal must be ethical and moral. Be a hearer and a doer (James 1:23)!
 6. *Moral and God-honoring ends (goals) that promote God’s will.* Men and women of character pursue God-honoring goals and ends, not out of obligation or duty, but out of loving obedience and conviction. Moral motives and means are not sufficient from a character standpoint. The ends pursued must glorify God by being obedient to his will for our lives and the lives of others. The ends, means, and motives can be moral and still remain outside of God’s will. For example, I may desire to become a youth pastor to serve God and bless others by helping children (moral motives). I can employ moral means by working my way through school, gain a degree, and obtain a youth pastor position. However, if God’s will is for me to become a teacher to inner-city adults, then I remain outside of his perfect will.
 7. *Wisdom.* Wisdom is the ultimate fruit of Christian servant leader character. It entails godly self-awareness, mature decision making, and reasoning skills that honor the higher order principles as we face nuanced value conflict situations led by the spirit (John 18:17–27; John 21:15–18). For example, in situations in which there is equal evidence or justification for a “second chance,” or punishment in the

workplace, it is important to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit and promote the higher order principle. In some instances, the situation warrants overlooking the offence, while in others, discipline or termination is the appropriate course of action. In many cases, it will require both elements to provide a balance between discipline and encouragement. A vital and vibrant relationship with the Holy Spirit requires seeking his presence and hearing his voice.

Fully-developed Christian servant leader character requires surrendering all to God: the righteous and the sinful aspects of our lives, our weaknesses and strengths, our temperaments, gifts, abilities, and accomplishments, as well as our abject failures and sins.

Christian servant leaders manifest a high degree of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). However, Christian servant leadership embraces an even higher order of reasoning: that of spiritual intelligence. What are some of the key differences? The foundation of emotional intelligence is in mainstream psychology embracing the conventional, scientific “time and chance” evolutionary understanding of human nature. Conversely, as Christians, we believe that God created the universe and set in motion all of the cosmological, physical, chemical, and biological processes that comprise our world. As such, we posit that there is an omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent higher power that plays an active role in human affairs. This provides an additional level of analysis—the spiritual—to help explain human behavior. For example, the explanations and recommendations for coping with stress that are based in naturalistic, emotional intelligence fail to address situations that appear (or are) hopeless in the natural. Without a belief in a higher power, we can slip into despair. Hence, our belief in God’s supernatural power to alter the physical laws, to be with us and protect us in a seemingly hopeless circumstance, and our ultimate confidence in heaven and the afterlife provide a measure of comfort and courage to face all forms of trials and tribulations.

Let us examine another area of mutual interest between emotional and spiritual intelligence—that of forgiveness, love, and giving. Emotional intelligence embraces forgiveness for its physical and emotional health benefits and for the overall promotion of relationship harmony. However, emotional intelligence fails to address the agape level of unconditional love, giving, and forgiveness that frees us from the reactions of others. Only the Holy Spirit provides the courage and wisdom to truly love, give to, and forgive our enemies and those that hurt, persecute, and betray us. When we forgive, give to, and love with no expectation of return, we enter a different level of freedom

that protects us from the inevitable failures, weaknesses, sins, and disappointments associated with our fallible human relationships. Finally, spiritual intelligence adds another dimension to the healthy pursuit of excellence: that of obeying the will of God. We can only achieve ultimate peace by humbly following God's path for our lives, irrespective of our level of external and internal success.

Application Questions

1. What are some key obstacles in your life that keep you from being a more consistent "hearer and a doer"?
2. Select one of the obstacles and develop a simple action plan for overcoming them. The first step is to recognize their presence and ask God for the wisdom and the will to make changes. For example, if one of the obstacles is a mixture of God-honoring and sinful motives for assuming a leadership role at work, ask for forgiveness for the sinful motive of using the power to punish an enemy and strive to love, serve, and support as Jesus did with Judas.
3. Reflect on your progress. How successful have you been?
4. What additional steps will help you to repent and love unconditionally?

CHRISTIAN SERVANT LEADER CHARACTER IN THE WORKPLACE

Let us now address more specifically the key elements of Christian character in the workplace. Christian workplace character entails developing the "triune towers" of encouragement, accountability, and integrity. Encouragement is essential in supporting other employees and providing hope in our modern workplaces, where job demands and stress are at critically elevated levels.

Christian servant leader character accountability is the delicate balance between grace and discipline, embracing a "tough love" conduct, character, and performance-based framework. Accountability imbeds within a value system that infuses authentic forgiveness and grace. Support and accountability, in turn, lean on the pillar of integrity, which is the authentic implementation of the espoused values. The worst incarnation of workplace character is to claim the embrace and practice of Christian servanthood—in which we promote the best interests of others, of stewardship in which we achieve the mission with integrity and excellence, and live by the Golden Rule—but fail to honor the principles. A discrepancy between policy and practice engenders a witch's brew of dashed expectations and generates a poisoned

atmosphere of cynicism, destroying trust and “shipwrecking” the faith of our subordinates, peers, and clients. This book illustrates the positive outcomes associated with character integrity in terms of individual and collective improvements in attitudes, behavior, and performance. A Christian servant leader commits to a covenantal relationship with each employee, recognizing that character development is a long-term, lifelong process. Below is a set of key servant leader character attributes as reflected in Scripture and servant leader literature (Table 1.1).

Christian servant leader character is truly a humbling and high calling with the greatest standard of accountability. It is better to be ignorant of effective practices than to know the truth and choose not to implement what God entrusts, as to whom much is given, much is required

Table 1.1 Key Servant Leader Character Elements Essential for Success

SLHRM Christian Character Attribute Scenarios

Love: The servant leader embraces the practice of love—that is, the ability to integrate the goals of achieving the mission with moral integrity while promoting the development, growth, and wellbeing of employees. Love entails righteous and moral motivation and action regardless of emotional state and the manager’s personal experiences and feelings toward employees. Love entails the dual elements of delaying gratification and altruism in the course of work duties, placing the needs of others first. For example, a city manager of a small local government must learn to overlook past betrayals by city council members and department heads who attempt to make deals independently. He must actively mentor and prepare the assistant city manager to assume his duties, hence making himself dispensable. In addition, the city manager must protect his subordinate from undue political interference at the risk of his job security.

Humility: Humility is a foundational character attribute. Humility is essential for servant leaders to avoid the twin poisons of pride and fear. True servant leader humility is the recognition that success and higher performance are the products of the synergies of committed team members and an inherent understanding of the manager’s strengths and weaknesses. Hence, humble managers are secure in their identity and perceive no threat when others perform well. In our city manager example, the humble city manager actively appoints subordinates that complement his strengths and weaknesses and empowers them to succeed.

Transparency: Transparency is a key character element that supports humility. Transparency is the consistent courage to share all types of information—positive and negative—regarding character and performance. When servant leaders practice transparency, it sends a clear signal that the manager welcomes open and honest feedback, thereby facilitating problem solving and driving fear from the workplace. For example, when our city manager makes mistakes regarding the accuracy of budget forecasts, he accepts responsibility, apologizes for the negative consequences, and openly discusses how he, and organizational practices, can improve. He does not attempt to externalize the blame or create excuses.

Table 1.1 (Continued)

SLHRM Christian Character Attribute Scenarios

Forgiveness: Servant leaders understand that personal and organizational wellbeing requires the genuine embrace of forgiveness. Mistakes, failure, weakness, and betrayal are a ubiquitous element of the human condition. Hence, servant leaders make the conscious choice to forgive others for their errors, and themselves for their contributions. Forgiveness applied with wisdom drives fear out of the workplace. The wise servant leader city manager will publicly recognize employees with good faith attempts that result in failure, thereby helping to promote learning and eliminating the fear of failure.

Hope and Perseverance: The servant leader understands that hope is the foundation of perseverance under stress. Servant leaders communicate genuine and contagious optimism and confidence that provide a rationale for employee sacrifices and a vision of a better future. Hence the servant leader is a “lighthouse” projecting a beacon of hope in the midst of organizational storms. Our city manager demonstrates his solidarity with employees in times of fiscal stress by first absorbing budget cuts through reductions in his and the rest of the executive team’s pay levels. He then charts a course of shared shouldering of the necessary budget cuts while empowering employees to restructure service delivery to enhance efficiency and effectiveness and reduce job losses.

Compassion and Empathy: Servant leaders understand the importance of understanding the experiences, needs, motives, and problems of their employees. If they are to serve and lead effectively, they need to take into account the “worldview” of those they serve. For example, our city manager understands the workload levels and working conditions of employees, and strives to maintain fair and sustainable staffing and performance expectations that reduce employee stress. This enables employees to avoid the perils of “compassion fatigue,” in which they lack either the energy or motivation to help other employees or customers.

(Luke 12:48). We can perform great works, but if the motives are flawed, they will come to naught, as reflected in Matthew 7:22–23 below:

On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’

Application Questions

1. Provide a short summary of your strengths and weaknesses related to the Christian servant leader character elements.
2. Select one strength and one weakness. Develop a short action plan to cultivate the strength and address the weakness.
3. What is your least well-developed Christian servant leader character attribute and why?

SERVANT LEADER: THE “CITY ON THE HILL” FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRITY: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Leadership is one of the foundational “windows to the heart,” reflecting individual and collective values and beliefs regarding the “theology of work” and its relationship to human nature. Does the leadership system honor biblical principles by shaping the values and incentives to serve, work, lead, and manage in a truly God-honoring and joyous, humble, and accountable fashion? Are we “hearers and doers” of the Word, as stated in James 1:23, or do we forget to honor the principles of servant leadership as modeled by Jesus? As it states in Luke 12:48, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.”

Christian servant leadership love begins and ends with a dynamic and vital relationship with Jesus Christ. From a Christian theological standpoint, our salvation is a glorious result of an individual decision to accept Christ. Our Christian growth and sanctification require a combination of individual effort and communal fellowship and accountability. As Christians, we possess both individual and corporate responsibility for justice. God judges individuals as well as the nations.

Why is servant leadership the foundation for this book? There are many approaches to leadership, but only servant leadership emphasizes the necessary balance between morality, mission achievement, and promoting the best interests and wellbeing of the key stakeholders (employees, clients, customers, and the community) (Northouse, 2013). Like yeast infusing bread, servant leadership influences the entire culture of an organization, promoting favorable outcomes at all levels. In essence, it is the Golden Rule in practice. The dual foundation of servant leadership is stewardship, which involves achieving the mission by using moral, motives, means and ends, and servanthood, which means promoting the best interests and needs of the key stakeholders. Servant leadership manifests both religious and secular roots (Bekker, 2010; Sendjaya, 2010). It is the foundational leadership principle of Christianity—as exemplified in the Old and New Testaments—with the culmination in the ministry of Jesus—as elaborated upon in the works of Wilkes (2008), Blanchard and Hodges (2005), and from a more secular perspective in the works of Greenleaf (1977). From an ethical standpoint, servant leadership is founded upon the integration of the three key ethical domains, that of deontological principles (moral laws), aretaic or virtue elements imbedded in moral character, and teleological or utilitarian principles that assess consequences (promote the greater good). There is no single agreed-upon conceptual or

operational definition of servant leadership with a fixed and narrowly defined set of attributes. A review by Roberts and Hess-Hernandez (2012/2013) identified thirty-nine attributes of servant leadership that include a combination of character attributes (love, humility, and forgiveness), leadership practices (empowerment and active listening), and cognitive attributes (foresight and conceptualization). Research, however, has demonstrated that servant leadership is a distinct and unique leadership approach, differentiated from the related domains of transformational leadership and leader-member exchange theories (Liden et al., 2008; Schaubroeck et al., 2011). A more detailed analysis appears in Table 1.2 with six global dimensions: the love-based servanthood elements, servant leader stewardship in completing the mission, servant leader character, servant leader behavior, servant leader reasoning abilities, and servant leader spiritual elements. Servanthood is the foundational element and includes the related attributes of altruism, serving others first, facilitating the success and growth of others, promoting healing, egalitarianism, and *agapao* love. Stewardship elements entail accomplishing the organizational mission using virtuous means, building up the community, and providing an inspiring vision. Key servant leader character attributes include moral integrity, empathy, humility, authenticity, trust, hope, courage, and forgiveness. Key servant leader behaviors include empowerment, active listening, goal setting, and relationship building. The elements of reasoning ability center on the presence of foresight and conceptualization skills. The final dimension provides transcendental spirituality and transformational influence. The absence of a tightly defined set of attributes is both a strength and weakness. It is a strength in that servant leadership, by conceptual definition, is holistic, organic, evolving, and a dynamic combination of heart, intellect, emotions, and spirit. By definition, it cannot be distilled into a reductionist and mechanical conceptualization. Conversely, the broad and variable conceptual elements impede uniform measurement and methodological rigor to support reliable and valid measures. However, as empirical research expands in scope, a greater degree of methodological consistency will follow.

It is important to clearly define the elements of servant leadership. The adoption of servant leadership is fully justified on a deontological and aretaic (virtue) basis. However, demonstrating its empirical influence helps buttress its adoption from a utilitarian orientation. In essence, this research is essential in demonstrating that servant leader love and character virtue generate favorable organizational outcomes in terms of employee and community wellbeing and individual and organizational performance (Showkeir, 2002).

Table 1.2 Servant Leader Attributes: Literature Summary (Number of Studies in Parentheses)**Servant Leader Attributes: Servanthood Motivational Elements**

- **Altruism (2):** Patterson, K. (2003); Reed, L. L., Vidaver-Cohen, D., & Colwell, S. R. (2011)
- **Altruistic Calling (1):** Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006)
- **Calling (2):** Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); Sun, P. T. (2013)
- **Covenantal Relationship (2):** Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora (2008); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010)
- **Egalitarianism (2):** Reed, L. L., Vidaver-Cohen, D., & Colwell, S. R. (2011); Mittal, R., & Dorfman, P. W. (2012)
- **Healing (5):** Spears, L. (1998); Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); van Dierendonck, D. (2011); Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., Meuser, J. D., & Wayne S. J. (2014)
- **Agapao Love (3):** Patterson, K. (2003); Dennis, R. S., & Bocarnea, M. (2005); Sun, P. T. (2013)
- **Serve Others First (4):** Greenleaf, R. K. (1977); Farling, M. L., Stone, A. J., & Winston, B. E. (1999); Patterson, K. (2003); Boone, L. W., & Makhani, S. (2012)
- **Needs of Other Over Self (1):** Laub, J. (1999)
- **Good of Followers Over Self Interest (2):** Hale, J. R., & Fields, D. L. (2007); Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007)
- **Positive Effect on Least Privileged (1):** Greenleaf, R. K. (1977)
- **Put Subordinates/Followers First (3):** Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); Liden, R. C., van Dierendonck, D. (2011); Liden, Panaccio, A., Hu, J., Meuser, J. D., & Wayne S. J. (2014)
- **Servanthood and Do Others Grow/Succeed (8):** Greenleaf, R. K. (1977); Spears, L. (1998); Laub, J. (1999); Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); van Dierendonck, D. (2011); Boone, L. W., & Makhani, S. (2012); Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., & Meuser, J. D. (in press)

Servant Leader Attributes: Stewardship Mission Elements

- **Accountability (1):** van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)
- **Building Community (4):** Spears, L. (1998); Laub, J. (1999); Reed, L. L., Vidaver-Cohen, D., & Colwell, S. R. (2011); Boone, L. W., & Makhani, S. (2012)
- **Creating Community Value (3):** Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); van Dierendonck, D. (2011); Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., Meuser, J. D., & Wayne S. J. (2014)
- **Responsible Leadership (1):** Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003)
- **Stewardship (3):** Spears, L. (1998); Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)
- **Vision (5):** Farling, M. L., Stone, A. J., & Winston, B. E. (1999); Patterson, K. (2003); Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003); Dennis, R. S., & Bocarnea, M. (2005); Boone, L. W., & Makhani, S. (2012)

Servant Leader Attributes: Character Elements

- **Authentic Self (2) and Authenticity (5):** Laub, J. (1999); Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003); Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007); Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008); Pekerti, A. A., & Sendjaya, S. S. (2010); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)
- **Behave Ethically (3):** Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); van Dierendonck (2011); Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., Meuser, J. D., & Wayne S. J. (2014)
- **Courage (2):** Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)
- **Credibility (1):** Farling, M. L., Stone, A. J., & Winston, B. E. (1999)
- **Empathy (4):** Spears, L. (1998); Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); Mittal, R., & Dorfman, P. W. (2012); Sun, P. T. (2013)
- **Forgiveness (1):** van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)

Table 1.2 (Continued)

Hope (1): Searle, T. P., & Barbuto, John, E. (2011)

- **Honesty (1):** Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003)
- **Humility (6):** Patterson, K. (2003); Dennis, R. S., & Bocarnea, M. (2005); Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007); Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011); Mittal, R., & Dorfman, P. W. (2012); Sun, P. T. (2013)
- **Moral Integrity (8):** Grahame, J. W. (1991); Ehrhart, M. G. (2004); Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007); Pekerti, A. A., & Sendjaya, S. S. (2010); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010); Walumbwa, F. O., Hartnell, C. A., & Oke, A. (2010); Reed, L. L., Vidaver-Cohen, D., & Colwell, S. R. (2011); Mittal, R., & Dorfman, P. W. (2012)
- **Trust (3):** Farling, M. L., Stone, A. J., & Winston, B. E. (1999); Patterson, K. (2003); Dennis, R. S., & Bocarnea, M. (2005)
- **Wisdom (1):** Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006)

Servant Leader Attributes: Behavioral Elements

- **Active Listening (3):** Spears, L. (1998); Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); Boone, L. W., & Makhani, S. (2012)
- **Consulting and Involving Others (1):** Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007)
- **Empowerment (9):** Patterson, K. (2003); Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003); Dennis, R. S., & Bocarnea, M. (2005); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); van Dierendonck, D. (2011); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011); Boone, L. W., & Makhani, S. (2012); Mittal, R., & Dorfman, P. W. (2012); Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., Meuser, J. D., & Wayne S. J. (2014)
- **Follower Development (3):** Wong, P. T. P., & Page, D. (2003); Hale, J. R., & Fields, D. L. (2007); Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007)
- **Goal setting (1):** Laub, J. (1999)
- **Initiative (1):** Laub, J. (1999)
- **Interpersonal Support (1):** Reed, L. L., Vidaver-Cohen, D., & Colwell, S. R. (2011)
- **Influencing Others (1):** Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007)
- **Inspiring Others (1):** Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007)
- **Persuasion (1):** Spears, L. (1998)
- **Relationship Building (1):** Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008)
- **Serving and Developing Others (1):** Wong, P. T. P., & Davey, D. (2007)
- **Shares Power (1):** Laub, J. (1999)
- **Standing Back (1):** van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)
- **Values and Has Confidence in People (1):** Laub, J. (1999)
- **Voluntary Subordination (2):** Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010)

Servant Leader Attributes: Reasoning Abilities

- **Awareness (1):** Spears, L. (1998)
- **Conceptualization (4):** Spears, L. (1998); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); van Dierendonck (2011); Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., Meuser, J. D., & Wayne S. J. (2014)
- **Foresight (3):** Spears, L. (1998); Laub, J. (1999); Patterson, K. (2003)
- **Persuasive Mapping (1):** Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006)
- **Philosophy (1):** Spears, L. (1998)

Servant Leader Attributes: Spirituality Elements

- **Transcendental Spirituality (3):** Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008); Pekerti, A. A., & Sendjaya, S. S. (2010); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010)
 - **Transformational Influence (2):** Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010)
-

In essence, is there an increase in the good arising from the practice of servant leadership?

There is a burgeoning body of literature demonstrating the positive influence of servant leadership on a host of attitudinal, behavioral, and performance outcomes (Parris & Peachey, 2013). A review of the empirical literature demonstrates robust, consistent, and compelling evidence as to the favorable influence of servant leadership on job attitudes, leadership effectiveness, work behaviors, performance, character formation, desirable personality attributes, and quality of life outcomes. Mayer (2010) proposes that servant leadership attributes increase follower need satisfaction in the key elements that comprise self-determination-theory (SDT), that of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985), thereby generating favorable attitudinal, behavioral, and performance outcomes.

Table 1.3 provides a detailed summary of the published literature that supports Mayer (2010) and the other servant leader models. Servant leadership is associated with higher levels of organizational commitment, job trust, job satisfaction, procedural justice, and engagement levels, among others. In terms of the leadership outcomes, servant leadership is associated with higher levels of leadership competence, commitment to one's supervisor, and trust in one's leader. In terms of behaviors, servant leadership promotes higher levels of organizational citizenship, employee creativity and helpfulness, and lower levels of organizational turnover. The favorable influence on productivity is equally impressive, with multiple studies indicating higher levels of team effectiveness, team potency, goal and process clarity, and firm performance. Servant leadership enhances essential character attributes such as hope, integrity, and loyalty. Finally, servant leadership promotes a positive work climate, enhances quality of work life, leads to employee wellbeing, and reduces burnout and work/family conflict. Only one study demonstrated no consistent influence of servant leadership on organizational performance (de Waal & Sivro, 2012). In conclusion, the conceptual and empirical evidence for the positive influence of servant leadership on a whole host of outcomes is very consistent and overwhelming. However, there are several important caveats. The number of studies is small and their methodological scope and breadth limited, especially when contrasted with other areas of leadership research. There is also potential publication bias for servant leadership.

Studies in closely related domains are consistent with positive servant leader empirical findings. For example, a meta-analysis of emotional intelligence (EI), which incorporates many of the behavioral elements of servant leadership—such as empathy—found that EI was a significant and major predictor of job performance (O'Boyle et al., 2011). Another

Table 1.3 Servant Leader: Empirical Literature Summary

Organizational Studies Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership: Job Attitudes

- **Affect and Cognitive Trust:** Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010); Schaubroeck, J., Lam, S. S. K., & Peng, A. C. (2011)
- **Commitment:** Ehrhart, M. G. (2004); Hale, J. R., & Fields, D. L. (2007); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008); Cerit, Y. (2009); Jaramillo, F., Grisaffe, D. B., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2009a); Jaramillo, F., Grisaffe, D. B., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2009b); Han, Y., Kakabadse, N. K., & Kakabadse, A. (2010); Pekerti, A. A., & Sendjaya, S. (2010); Schneider, S. K., & George, W. M. (2011); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011); van Dierendonck, D., Stam, D., Boersma, P., de Windt, N., & Alkema, J. (2014); Yingying, Z., & Qing, M. (2014)
- **Commitment to Change:** Taylor, T., Martin, B. N., Hutchinson, S., & Jinks, M. (2007); Kool, M., & van Dierendonck, D. (2012)
- **Disengagement:** Hunter, E. M., Neubert, M. J., Perry, S. J., Witt, L. A., Penney, L. M., & Weinberger, E. (2013)
- **Empathy:** Washington, R., Sutton, C., & Feild, H. (2006)
- **Engagement:** Parris, D. L., & Peachy, J. W. (2012); Prottas, D. J. (2013); Carter, D., & Baghurst, T. (2014); De Clercq, D., Bouckennooghe, D., Raja, U., & Matsyborska, G. (2014); de Sousa, M. C., & van Dierendonck, D. (2014); van Dierendonck, D., Stam, D., Boersma, P., de Windt, N., & Alkema, J. (2014)
- **Interactional Justice:** Kool, M., & van Dierendonck, D. (2012)
- **Interpersonal Trust:** Chatbury, A. A., Beaty, D. D., & Kriek, H. S. (2011)
- **Leader-Member Exchange:** Dal, L., & Çorbacioğlu, S. (2014)
- **Loyalty:** Carter, D., & Baghurst, T. (2014)
- **Organizational Trust:** Reinke, S. J. (2004); Joseph, E. E., & Winston, B. E. (2005); Washington, R., Sutton, C., & Feild, H. (2006); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010); Rezaei, M., Salehi, S., Shafiei, M., & Sabet, S. (2011); Jones, D. (2012a); Jones, D. (2012b); Uru Sani, F. O., Caliskan, S. C., Atan, O., & Yozgat, U. (2013); Chan, S. H., & Mak, W. (2014)
- **Procedural Justice:** Ehrhart, M. G. (2004); Chung, J. Y., Jung, C. S., Kyle, G. T., & Petrick, J. F. (2010); Walumbwa, F. O., Hartnell, C. A., & Oke, A. (2010)
- **Satisfaction:** Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); Mayer, D. M., Bardes, M., & Piccolo, R. F. (2008); Cerit, Y. (2009); Chung, J. Y., Jung, C. S., Kyle, G. T., & Petrick, J. F. (2010); Jenkins, M., & Stewart, A. C. (2010); Mehta, S., & Pillay, R. (2011); Schneider, S. K., & George, W. M. (2011); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011); Jones, D. (2012b); Prottas, D. J. (2013); Chan, S. H., & Mak, W. (2014)
- **Self-Efficacy:** Walumbwa, F. O., Hartnell, C. A., & Oke, A. (2010)

Organizational Studies Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership: Leadership & Supervisor Attributes

- **Commitment to Supervisor:** Walumbwa, F. O., Hartnell, C. A., & Oke, A. (2010)
- **Leader Competence:** Washington, R., Sutton, C., & Feild, H. (2006); Mayer, D. M., Bardes, M., & Piccolo, R. F. (2008); McCuddy, M. K., & Cavin, M. C. (2008)
- **Leader Development:** Melchar, D. E., & Bosco, S. M. (2010)
- **Leader Trust:** Reinke, S. J. (2004); Joseph, E. E., & Winston, B. E. (2005)
- **Organizational Support:** Yingying, Z., & Qing, M. (2014)
- **Satisfaction with Supervisor:** Ehrhart, M. G. (2004)
- **Supervisory Support:** Ehrhart, M. G. (2004)

(Continued)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

Organizational Studies Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership: Work Behaviors

- **Collaboration:** Irving, J. A., & Longbotham, G. J. (2007); Garber, J. S., Madigan, E. A., Click, E. R., & Fitzpatrick, J. J. (2009); Sturm, B. A. (2009)
- **Community Citizenship:** Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008)
- **Employee Creativity and Helping Behavior:** Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); Neubert, M. J., Kacmar, K. M., Carlson, D. S., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2008); Jaramillo, F., Grisaffé, D. B., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2009b); Koyuncu, M., Burke, R. J., Astakhova, M., Eren, D., & Cetin, H. (2014); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Chenwei, L., & Meuser, J. D. (2014)
- **Empowerment:** Taylor, T., Martin, B. N., Hutchinson, S., & Jinks, M. (2007); de Waal, A., & Sivo, M. (2012)
- **Organizational Citizenship:** Ehrhart, M. G. (2004); Neubert, M. J., Kacmar, K. M., Carlson, D. S., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2008); Ebener, D. R., & O'Connell, D. J. (2010); Vondey, M. (2010); Walumbwa, F. O., Hartnell, C. A., & Oke, A. (2010); Hu, J., & Liden, R. C. (2011); Güçel, C., & Begeç, S. (2012); Long-Zeng, W., Eliza Ching-Yick, T., Pingping, F., Ho Kwong, K., & Jun, L. (2013); Wu, L., Tse, E. C., Fu, P., Kwan, H. K., & Liu, J. (2013); Zehiri, C., Akyuz, B., Erin, M. S., Turhan, G. (2013); Yoshida, D. T., Sendjaya, S., Hirst, G., & Cooper, B. (2014)
- **Organizational Learning:** Choudhary, A., Akhtar, S., & Zaheer, A. (2013)
- **Servant Follower Development:** Parris, D. L., & Peachy, J. W. (2012)
- **Turnover:** Jaramillo, F., Grisaffé, D. B., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2009a); Babakus, E., Yavas, U., & Ashill, N. J. (2011); Schneider, S. K., & George, W. M. (2011); Jones, D. (2012b); Hunter, E. M., Neubert, M. J., Perry, S. J., Witt, L. A., Penney, L. M., & Weinberger, E. (2013); Prottas, D. J. (2013); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Chenwei, L., & Meuser, J. D. (2014)

Organizational Studies Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership: Performance Outcomes

- **Firm Performance:** Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006); Peterson, S. J., Galvin, B. M., & Lange, D. (2012); Jones, D. (2012a); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Chenwei, L., & Meuser, J. D. (2014)
- **Goal and Process Clarity:** Taylor, T., Martin, B. N., Hutchinson, S., & Jinks, M. (2007); Hu, J., & Liden, R. C. (2011)
- **High Performance Attributes:** de Waal, A., & Sivo, M. (2012)
- **In-Role Performance:** Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008)
- **Profit:** Jones, D. (2012b)
- **Team Effectiveness:** Reinke, S. J. (2004); Joseph, E. E., & Winston, B. E. (2005); Irving, J. A., & Longbotham, G. J. (2007); Sendjaya, S., & Pekerti, A. (2010); Hu, J., & Liden, R. C. (2011); Schaubroeck, J., Lam, S. S. K., & Peng, A. C. (2011); Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Chenwei, L., & Meuser, J. D. (2014)
- **Team Potency (Confidence or Efficacy):** Chung, J. Y., Jung, C. S., Kyle, G. T., & Petrick, J. F. (2010); Hu, J., & Liden, R. C. (2011)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

Organizational Studies Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership: Character Elements

- **Hope:** Searle, T. P., & Barbutto, John, E., Jr. (2011)
- **Integrity:** Washington, R., Sutton, C., & Feild, H. (2006)
- **Loyalty:** Ding, D., Lu, H., Song, Y., & Lu, Q. (2012)

Organizational Studies Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership: Personality Attributes

- **Agreeableness:** Washington, R., Sutton, C., & Feild, H. (2006); Hunter, E. M., Neubert, M. J., Perry, S. J., Witt, L. A., Penney, L. M., & Weinberger, E. (2013)
- **Extraversion:** Hunter, E. M., Neubert, M. J., Perry, S. J., Witt, L. A., Penney, L. M., & Weinberger, E. (2013)

Organizational Studies Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership: Employee Quality of Work Life & Health Related Outcomes

- **Burnout:** Babakus, E., Yavas, U., & Ashill, N. J. (2011)
- **Employee Wellbeing:** Reinke, S. J. (2004); Jaramillo, F., Grisaffe, D. B., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2009b); van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)
- **Health:** Prottas, D. J. (2013)
- **Life Satisfaction:** Prottas, D. J. (2013)
- **Positive Work Climate:** Neubert, M. J., Kacmar, K. M., Carlson, D. S., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2008); Jaramillo, F., Grisaffe, D. B., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2009a); Black, G. L. (2010)
- **Stress:** Prottas, D. J. (2013); Rivkin, W., Diestel, S., & Schmidt, K. (2014)
- **Vitality:** van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011)
- **Work/Family Conflict:** Prottas, D. J. (2013)
- **Work/Family Enrichment:** Zhang, H., Kwan, H. K., Everett, A. M., & Jian, Z. (2012)

Organizational Attributes and Studies Not Supporting Favorable Influence/Correlation of Servant Leadership

- **Firm Performance:** de Waal, A., & Sivo, M. (2012)
-

interesting study on companionate love in a long-term care facility found a favorable influence on employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, teamwork, absenteeism, and emotional exhaustion and beneficial effects on the patient related to mood, quality of life, satisfaction, and fewer emergency room visits (Barsade & O’Neill, 2014).

Limitations and Critiques of Servant Leadership

One key element of the discussion is to rebut the varied and conflicting stereotypes and misinformation regarding servant leadership. Three of the most common are: (1) that servant leadership is “soft” management with lower degrees of leadership influence and direction, (2) that servant leadership occasions a reduced emphasis on employee

discipline, and (3) that servant leaders possess a martyr complex. Servant leadership is love-based, but entails a 360-degree version of love that incorporates grace and accountability, forgiveness and discipline, autonomy and clear boundaries. One cannot be a servant leader and not achieve the mission and discipline of the workforce. In effect, servant leaders engender a culture of performance excellence that *increases* demands on employees (Reinke, 2004; Irving & Longbotham, 2007; Prosser, 2010; Sendjaya, 2010). Servant leaders facilitate the meeting of true employee needs, but do not cater to those desires and wants that are contrary to their wellbeing and mission integrity. Finally, servant leaders are not martyrs. They actively promote self-care and work/life harmony and balance. In the pages to come, we will more fully define servant leadership in its full balance and synchronization.

From a methodological standpoint, there is an absence of agreement on the specific elements and core dimensions of servant leadership (Northouse, 2013). However, this reflects the inherent complexity of servant leadership and its holistic and unique combination of leadership, motivation, character, behavior, and reasoning abilities. Hence, it will take many years of sustained study to confirm the basic attributes and the many moderating and mediating relationships.

The explicit prescriptive, normative, and moral emphasis of servant leadership is another source of conflict (Northouse, 2013). It is aspirational and idealistic in essence. However, all theories and approaches to leadership promote a worldview of values, norms, and moral principles. They range from the secular to the religious and spiritual. There is no neutral or values-free form of management; hence, they are all similar in this regard. For many who embrace servant leadership, it is a deontological moral imperative, hence the absence of motivation toward empirical research. However, a full understanding of servant leadership recognizes the elements of stewardship and mission achievement, and hence the need for promoting excellence of performance and character. Empirical research on servant leadership is moving forward and becoming more robust.

Another issue relates to the interface between contextual and cultural elements, leader and follower attributes, and follower receptivity (Liden et al., 2008; van Dierendonck, 2011; Northhouse, 2013). In other words, do employees manifest a universal desire and/or receptivity to servant leadership? Given the contingent nature of leadership (Northhouse, 2013) and inherent human variability, clearly the answer is no. There is limited empirical evidence on the subject, but Meuser et al. (2008) found higher levels of performance and organizational

citizenship when subordinates desired servant leadership and lower levels when subordinates lacked interest. For both leaders and followers, the underlying motivational element is critical, given the obstacles and challenges associated with servant leadership. Ng and Koh (2010) provide a “motivation-to-serve” model incorporating personality traits such as agreeableness and conscientiousness, which are positively associated with servant leader motivation, while neuroticism is negatively correlated with servant leader motivation. The second element of the model is the value orientation with self-transcendence (benevolence, equality) promoting the motivation-to-serve while self-enhancement (power, achievement, hedonism) attenuates the altruistic motives associated with servant leadership.

Clearly, the receptivity and effectiveness of servant leadership is maximized by a compatible organizational culture fully integrated into the human resource (HR) system through its mission, vision, and values. In essence, the HR system’s decision making process links personnel decision making to servant leader mission, motivation, character, and behavior. Laub (2005) and Herman (2008) assessed the organizational culture of one hundred organizations, classifying them into autocratic, paternalistic, and servant leader (Laub, 2010). Only 14 percent of the studied organizations received classification as servant leader oriented, as most were a mixture of paternalistic (55%) and autocratic (31%) (Laub, 2010). However, even in those situations in which the culture and employee attributes conflict with servant leadership, the astute servant leader adjusts his or her leadership approach to honor and accommodate subordinate preferences, while not violating key principles such as promoting the best interests of employees. Hence, the leader maintains the core elements of servant leadership while patiently adjusting to organizational climate. Over time, servant leadership can increase trust and build relationships, thereby changing subordinate attitudes, as the vast majority of employees desire dignified and fair treatment. In essence, an organizational microclimate of receptivity to servant leadership is developed organically.

Global Theological and Cultural Scope of Servant Leadership

One final question relates to the international religious and comparative scope of servant leadership. The practice of servant leadership is global in scope, finding support in a variety of religious and philosophical worldviews (Bekker, 2010). The research indicates cultural differences related to power distance, but a high level of consensus on the “Golden Rule” dimensions (Irving, 2010).

The universality of servant leadership is reflected in the theology of the world's major religions as well as in international conceptual and empirical research. This comports with Christian theology and the notion of "common grace." Common grace is the principle presented in Scripture that God has written his law of Golden Rule conduct in the hearts of humanity (see Romans 2:14–15). These principles of interpersonal treatment include many servant leadership elements, thereby enabling society to function with an essential degree of peace, harmony, and cohesiveness across all cultures and time periods, regardless of their direct knowledge or belief in the Christian Trinitarian God. The following section summarizes key servant leader principles that are found in Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism/Buddhism. These include such foundational principles as effective leadership beginning with service, group and mission interest over self-interest, promoting the greater good, personal character virtue as reflected in the ethicality and morality of decision making and behavior, ongoing introspection to ensure righteous motives, means and ends, and rejecting interpersonal comparison and competition.

From an intercultural research standpoint, the growing body of empirical and conceptual literature reinforces the centrality of servant leadership. Of the 65 empirical studies published on servant leadership as of press time, 36 or 55 percent utilized international samples outside of the United States. See Table 1.4 for a complete summary. The leading countries, excluding the US, include China (9), Turkey (6) and the Netherlands (4). From a regional standpoint, most were in Asia (15), followed by Europe (9), the Middle East (8) and Africa (3). Hence, the empirical evidence reinforces that servant leadership promotes favorable workplace attitudes, behaviors, and performance levels across cultures and regions of the world. The next section addresses key religious elements.

IMPORTANT SERVANT LEADER ATTRIBUTES IN JUDAISM

Judaism emphasizes many key elements consistent with servant leadership. It begins with the promotion of a division of power to avoid excessive degrees of centralization of authority. This was reflected in the communal nature of leadership in the synagogue. Another key element is the emphasis on delegation and empowerment, as seen in Exodus 18 when Moses assigned fifty worthy men to serve as judges to reduce his workload and lower waiting times, as well as the importance of an organized leadership succession process as recorded in Deuteronomy 31.

Table 1.4 Frequency Count of Servant Leader Studies: Country and Continents of Origin ($N = 71$, 65 total studies, 6 with two nations studied)

Country and Continent of Origin	<i>N</i>	%
USA	33	46.5
China	9	12.7
Turkey	6	8.5
Netherlands	4	5.6
United Kingdom	2	2.8
Indonesia	2	2.8
New Zealand	2	2.8
Australia	1	1.4
Canada	1	1.4
France	1	1.4
Germany	1	1.4
Ghana	1	1.4
India	1	1.4
Iran	1	1.4
Kenya	1	1.4
Pakistan	1	1.4
Portugal	1	1.4
South Africa	1	1.4
Trinidad/Tobago	1	1.4
Ukraine	1	1.4
Total	71	100
North America	34	47.9
Asia	15	21.1
Europe	10	14.1
Middle East	8	11.3
Africa	3	4.2
Caribbean	1	1.4
Total	71	100

The metaphor of leading through service is clearly reinforced in the image of the shepherd who carefully tends and protects the flock, placing himself in danger to guard the sheep. This beautiful imagery is most eloquently portrayed in Psalm 23 and in David as king (1 Kings 2) (Bekker, 2010). An ongoing emphasis on the overall unity, wholeness, and wellbeing of the community is consistent with the biblical “mission statement” that outlines the prime purpose of leaders as to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves (Deuteronomy 6:4) (Bekker, 2010). Finally, Judaism emphasized that leaders should embrace a commitment to the humanity and dignity of all subjects, both Jews and foreigners, and

embrace authenticity of action, cultivating a moral imagination, and promoting righteous conduct, thereby providing godly role models and clear paths for moral growth (Bekker, 2010).

IMPORTANT SERVANT LEADER ATTRIBUTES IN CHRISTIANITY

Christianity emphasizes many key elements consistent with servant leadership. It begins with an overt Christological focus as leaders are called to authentic discipleship based upon the example of Jesus Christ. Hence there is mimetic imitation of the Divine as leaders strive to reproduce the character, behavior, and conduct of Christ in accomplishing the organization's mission (Ayers, 2006; Bekker, 2006). Servant leaders strive to use power in a meek and humble fashion, recognizing that their source of authority comes from God and that their role as stewards involves using power to honor God through mission accomplishment and the growth and wellbeing of followers (Engstrom, 1976). Hence, it is a follower-centered approach to power.

Servant leadership, as demonstrated by the life and ministry of Jesus, centers on the dynamic and sometimes paradoxical balance involved in achieving the mission as directed by Father God while serving others with love. This follower-directed approach merges the macro and micro focuses of love by cultivating the growth and wellbeing of followers by gaining their commitment through free will in order to achieve a transcendent mission through goal-directed individual and collective efforts, subordinating personal interests for the greater good. In the Christian worldview, power is another manifestation of love and is the energy source for the Church to accomplish its mission. Hence, power is freely delegated to each person through the Holy Spirit to allow them to accomplish his or her unique personal calling. This is reflected in the Trinitarian nature of God, in which God the Father delegates power and authority to Jesus and the Holy Spirit who work in harmony, empowering each other to accomplish essential aspects of the mission. Jesus stated that the disciples would do greater things (John 14:12) through the power of the Holy Spirit; hence, power and authority are not fixed assets, but eternally and infinitely expanding expressions of God's love.

Another key Christian worldview element is the character virtue of *cursus pudorum*, which is the follower's voluntary surrender in love to the will of God (Bekker, 2010). This humble capitulation is unconditional obedience to God's will and purpose across all life circumstances,

whether in a state of exaltation or abasement (Bekker, 2010). This is contracted with the concept of *cursus honorum* (course of offices), the formalized sequence of public offices during the Roman Empire, in which the needs of the state and ruler dominate both individuals and the promotion of the common good (Bekker, 2010). In essence, the purpose of followers is to serve the needs of leaders, while the Christological view is that leaders exist to serve God and their followers, an expression of the Great Commandment to first love God and then your neighbors (followers) as yourselves (Bekker, 2010) as seen in Matthew 5:17–19, Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 11, Philippians 2:5, and Matthew 20:26.

IMPORTANT SERVANT LEADER ATTRIBUTES IN ISLAM

Islam emphasizes the importance of integrity in leaders. For example, its teachings claim a harmony between the life of Mohammad (the founding prophet of Islam) and the teachings of the Koran on the foundational importance of virtuous character attributes and being an authentic adherent and example (Kriger & Seng, 2005; Bekker, 2010). Examples in the Koran include (Bekker, 2010):

- a. “and you stand an exalted standard of character” al-Qalam (68:4)
- b. “good deeds, regular prayer, practice regular charity, and constantly serve US” Surah 21. Al-Anbiyaa, Ayah 73
- c. The love of Allah, motivates leaders to lead in moral and ethical ways (Peterson, 2001)
- d. Effective leadership begins with service to Allah. Leaders learn to lead by honoring the spiritual disciplines that venerate Allah, including prayer, fasting, reading of the Koran, and acts of service (Bekker, 2010). Service as leadership is central to early Islam (Kriger & Seng, 2005). A major goal of Islam, like servant leadership, is to eradicate all problems in our social life (Bekker, 2010).

Islam views leaders as “caretakers” entrusted by Allah to carefully steward the precious human, animal, material, and monetary resources given by God (Kriger & Seng, 2005). Islam emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the character of the elite, their leadership integrity, and the health, wellbeing, and morality of society as a whole. Leaders are called upon to balance the civic square of collective social action and individual morality, as well as the spiritual and moral (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1994; Kriger & Seng, 2005).

The definition of wisdom in Islam is similar to the definition of servant leadership in Christianity. Wisdom, according to Islamic scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, is the integration of deeds, knowledge, and virtues, similar to the morality of motives, means, and ends supported by the ethicality of knowledge, belief, and action (Kriger & Seng, 2005). He taught that the study of character is more important than the study of theology or belief (Kriger & Seng, 2005). In essence, in Islamic traditions a leader must be a “hearer and a doer.” Islamic teachings emphasize that the leader derives the authority and power to rule from the consent of the governed, and is hence a very similar notion to our modern democracy and the conception of servant leader empowerment (Kriger & Seng, 2005).

IMPORTANT SERVANT LEADER ATTRIBUTES IN BUDDHISM

Buddhism provides many teachings consistent with servant leadership. Leaders in Buddhism are called upon to embrace altruism and a recognition of universal interdependency within a system. The foundation is the shared character traits (the four immeasurable states) of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity (calm temperament under stress) (Kriger & Seng, 2005; Bekker, 2010). The ultimate example of servant leadership in Buddhism is the Bodhisattva, a leader who sacrifices his or her personal opportunity to achieve enlightenment (the cessation of desire and achieving unity with the universe) to help others who are struggling with personal character growth (Bekker, 2010). A Bodhisattva sacrifices both life and soul to help others avoid degradation, thereby voluntarily descending into “hell” so others will have a chance to be saved (Kriger & Seng, 2005; Bekker, 2010).

Buddhism embraces a very similar understanding of servant leader character and wisdom to Christianity. Buddhism emphasizes appropriate motives, means, and ends through orthodoxy (correct knowledge and belief) and orthopraxis (correct decisions, actions, and behaviors). The Fourth Noble Truth of Buddhism emphasizes wisdom, mental development, and ethical conduct through the eightfold path (Bekker, 2010):

1. Right view
2. Right intentions
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood

6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

Buddhism's focus on mindfulness is similar to servant leadership's emphasis on empathy, living in the moment through active listening, thereby resulting in more authentic relationships. Another key element in Buddhism that is fully compatible with servant leadership is to reject personal comparisons in which the observer uses societal or self-developed standards of success to classify relationships and people into "winners and losers," worthy or less worthy, thereby enhancing pride, fear, complacency, and organizational hierarchy (Gray & Kriger, 2005; Kriger & Seng, 2005). In Buddhism, the focus is on the erosion of distinctions between leaders and followers thereby promoting a higher degree of commonality of interest while recognizing that success is the product of the team and the system (Kriger & Seng, 2005). It also incentivizes situational leadership in which all organizational members may become leaders as the circumstances dictate (Gronn, 2002; Kriger & Seng, 2005).

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your organization's leadership climate? Are servant leadership principles practiced?
2. What are the strengths of your personal leadership approach as defined by the attributes of servant leadership?
3. How can your organization improve its effectiveness in practicing servant leadership?

CHAPTER 2



SERVANT FOLLOWERSHIP

So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:42–44).

Improving our leadership skills is a lifelong pursuit. From a Christian worldview perspective, when we seek leadership skills first, we are placing the proverbial “cart before the horse.” Jesus was an effective leader because he practiced servanthood first! Jesus set the standards for both leadership and followership by his complete obedience to the will of the Father. He spent the first thirty years of his life obeying his parents, being an excellent carpenter, and serving the Lord in a humble fashion. From conception to ascension, in his every word and action, Jesus promoted the mission that the Father anointed him to complete: the redemptive work of the Cross.

Thus, we cannot learn to lead like Jesus until we learn to serve like Jesus. An excellent book on this subject is *Jesus on Leadership* by C. Gene Wilkes (2008). The birth of Christian servant leadership lies in servant followership, in which employees develop the essential character traits (the fruit of the Holy Spirit) that enable leaders to use their gifts and skills in a humble, responsible, mature, and unselfish manner. Servant followership entails such key attributes as patience in enduring trials and tribulations, learning from mistakes, teachability, obedience to authority, accepting responsibility for solving problems, exercising initiative, and helping coworkers and clients even when inconvenient or contrary to personal interests. Another key element is self-awareness and knowledge. Servant followers understand their

motives, strengths, and weaknesses and select jobs based upon their gifts and passions, thereby reducing stress on themselves and others.

Servant followership entails committing every aspect of our work to godly excellence, irrespective of the obstacles and situation (“Work for God, not man,” Colossians 3:23). Even when we work for unjust earthly masters, God is pleased when we endure suffering for righteous conduct. The Holy Spirit leads and guides Christian servant followers through prayer and the inner witness. We are then able to achieve the challenging balance between enduring persecution silently and embracing righteous anger to overturn the tables of the moneychangers (Matthew 21:12). We need to seek God’s guidance to craft a response that balances “voice, endurance, and exit” (Hirschman, 1970). Deciding which strategy to employ requires a careful reflective process that entails seeking confirmation through the Word, prayer, unfolding circumstances, and our inner peace.

Servant followers understand that God is the only performance evaluator who matters; hence their “spiritual job description” is the most important element. The Lord rewards those who pursue and practice godly excellence and integrity at work with the benefits of a clear conscience and the internal “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). There is no guarantee of earthly justice in the present and future, but we do trust that the Lord is the instrument for judgment and accountability for our challenging relationships in the workplace (“Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord,” Romans 12:19).

These character elements require a conscious and deliberate dedication to growth (progressive sanctification) through the dying to the self—unrealizable fully until we are face to face with the Lord. It is a high and lofty standard, in essence, another element of working out our salvation with fear and trembling daily. When we practice servant followership in today’s troubled and stress-filled workplace, we become that candle in the dark, shining the light, hope, and love of Christ into the gloomy recesses of our workplaces. Next I have listed some of the key attributes of servant followership. Pray every day for God’s strength to serve with humility and obey the Gospel.

TWENTY-FIVE KEY ATTRIBUTES OF SERVANT FOLLOWERS

1. *Obey the first two commandments—love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself* (Luke 10:27). Our adherence to these principles is the foundation for a personal relationship with Jesus and a necessary

precondition for placing Christ at the center of our lives. This entails the purposeful and enthusiastic adherence to Christian spiritual disciplines (prayer, reading the Scriptures, Christian fellowship, etc.). The spiritual disciplines provide the foundation for the development and integration of the necessary character traits for workplace servanthood through our ongoing work relationships (love, humility, forgiveness, patience, perseverance, etc.).

2. *Practice 360-degree forgiveness (self, God, and others).* Forgiveness is a foundational character attribute. An absence of forgiveness is a powerful impediment to healing, growth, and healthy interpersonal relationships at the physical, spiritual, and emotional levels. A prison of toxic emotions holds us captive when we are unable to surrender the wrongs committed against us, as we repeatedly relive the events that precipitated the pain. Forgiving the person who wronged us demonstrates our commitment to loving others unconditionally, consistent with Jesus' example. In the workplace, the absence of forgiveness produces a host of pathologies, including the inability to learn from mistakes, a hostile climate toward innovation and creativity, and a repression of growth. A lack of forgiveness is a form of relationship pollution producing toxins that destroy the fabric of healthy human interactions, creating elevated mental and physical stress. With the ongoing practice of forgiveness, there is a higher degree of transparency, honesty, problem solving, and conflict resolution.
3. *Serve just and unjust masters with excellence as modeled by David with Saul* (1 Samuel 18:11). One of the greatest tests of faith in God's provision and protection is to serve with excellence when our efforts are not valued, are distorted, or are ignored and unrecognized. As God sends the rain on the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45), God urges workplace believers to complete our work duties reliably and skillfully, irrespective of how fairly we are treated. David modeled this principle under great provocation: when Saul attempted to kill him with a spear (1 Samuel 18:11), David ducked and continued to serve. Do we possess the courage to do the same?
4. *Assert leadership when the situation warrants our intervention.* One of the great impediments to a genuine Christian witness is adopting a defensive and legalistic approach to our jobs. When we are reluctant to use our talents, assume responsibility, and exercise leadership in solving problems, we impose costs on our coworkers and clients, and depreciate organizational effectiveness. One of the great character attributes of Jesus was his embrace

of the “ministry of interruptions.” Jesus’ formal “job description” was to preach and reach the nation of Israel, but he answered to the higher-order principle of responding in love to those in need. We must do the same! We all have natural job descriptions written by our employer, but of greater importance is our spiritual job description that entails loving our neighbor as ourselves.

5. *Embrace the healthy pursuit of excellence, adopt realistic standards of performance, accept the inevitability of mistakes, and welcome the value of trial and error in the learning process.* Our temporal and spiritual job descriptions call for us to work with excellence. What does excellence entail from a godly standpoint? One of the elements is that excellence entails loving obedience. We perform to the best of our ability and treat others according to the Golden Rule, but recognize that only God determines the outcome. This enables us to rest in God’s peace irrespective of the situation and associated consequences, thereby reducing stress, anxiety, and fear. When we fail, we “fall forward with grace,” confident that we will learn and grow from the situation, given our trust in God’s providential intervention to bring good from all situations, as we see in Romans 8:28.
6. *Practice initiative and creativity with enthusiasm.* Servant followers assume responsibility for solving performance problems both within and outside of their normal job description and work requirements. The goal is to use all of the creative gifts and talents God grants to take dominion over our work environment and be fruitful in our job domain. When we consistently make the choice to withhold our skills, time, and talents, we impoverish the work environment.
7. *Ensure reliable and conscientious work performance in all situations.* Servant followers understand the importance of being faithful in the routine and exceptional, in the minor and major job duties, both in the unobserved “behind the scenes” and the highly visible. Good and faithful servants possess a passionate conviction to please the Lord, understanding that ultimately we must all give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
8. *Honor your employer by avoiding a critical or cynical spirit and by providing honest, constructive feedback in appropriate settings.* As servant followers, we must provide clear information on performance issues, both positive and negative. Withholding, distorting, or selectively presenting information to promote gain or avoid punishment for self and others impedes truth and problem solving. It requires great courage and wisdom to honor this requirement.

9. *Pray for your leaders, subordinates, peers, and customers.* It is vital as servant followers to support every member of the team through intercessory prayer. If we are to develop the courage, wisdom, and discernment to love others, to complete our work duties with excellence, and to resist the darker impulses and pressures to compromise our ethical and moral integrity, we must commit to lifting all in prayer. The call especially applies to those who are difficult to love, the “sandpaper” people, those who resist, persecute, and hold ill will toward us. The only effective eternal weapon is to respond in love, of which prayer is the foundation. To pray for the best interests of our enemies is a powerful statement of forgiveness and faith.
10. *Practice gratitude for past, present, and future blessings.* Servant followers are grateful for God’s provision, favor, and protection in all situations. The apostle Paul calls us to be content in any circumstance (Philippians 4:11), and the only means to embrace this principle in times of trial and trouble is to look beyond what is seen and through faith thank God for his provision, protection, and the blessed assurance that we will never be tested or tempted beyond our ability to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). As Christians, we go beyond the half-full principle. We are realists in that we see that the glass is half full, and we are grateful, but by faith we have an earnest expectation of hope that the glass will become full and overflowing in due time. As stated in Galatians 6:9: “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.”
11. *Commit to the success of your supervisor and coworkers.* Servant followers understand and are comfortable in their identity as team players and the necessity for others to “shine brightly.” One of your prime work duties is to help others around you to achieve their work goals. There are times when we “must decrease so others can increase” (John 3:30). In prayer, an active embrace of support entails such factors as helping others when they are overwhelmed with the quantity or quality of work or need assistance in learning new tasks, providing moral support and encouragement in stressful situations, and simply taking time to listen.
12. *Resist the human impulse to rejoice when our enemies, competitors, or those we dislike experience difficulties* (Proverbs 24:17). The “path less traveled” is to take joy in the success of others while being sorrowful over their failures, even with the “tough love” and “sandpaper” people whom we dislike or who abhor us or view us as enemies. One of the most human emotions is to take

joy when those who have hurt us fail or suffer. As the cliché states, “Misery loves company.” When we make the choice to ask the Lord and the Holy Spirit to grant us the strength to “love our enemies” in spite of our feelings, our obedience to this principle changes the work climate in a very profound manner. It clearly releases a power that melts hardened hearts, as it requires courage to surrender our natural self-protective mechanisms.

13. *Do not compare yourself to others.* A clear statement of this principle is Galatians 6:4–5 (New Living Translation): “Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won’t need to compare yourself to anyone else. For we are each responsible for our own conduct.” The goal is to learn from colleagues, not to assume their identity. As the Scripture states, “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense” (2 Corinthians 10:12). Comparison leads to many sinful and deceptive emotions, beliefs, and actions—from envy, jealousy, and lust to fear, anxiety, pride, complacency, and judgmentalism. Misguided comparison is the source of much misery, stress, and strife in the workplace, as we use inaccurate standards and knowledge to assess others. We judge the surface, missing the key details of the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The goal is to learn from others, but not to allow our perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses to control how we view ourselves. We all have a tendency to hide our weaknesses and showcase our strengths, making accurate assessment under any circumstances challenging. We can learn from others, but not judge them or us.
14. *Practice humility which is a foundational servant follower virtue.* We must recognize and be grateful for our God-given gifts, strengths, weaknesses, and limits. Humility is not self-depreciation, degrading, or discounting of our strengths and accomplishments. It is a humble but grateful recognition that all of our capabilities and successes come from God and are to be used to glorify him through loving and serving him as well as our coworkers. Servant followers understand that there are no “self-made men or women” and that we are all members of an interconnected and interdependent system. We are all debtors to God and his provision and protection. Humility recognizes that we possess both a knowledge and an application deficit. Hence, we always have much to learn, and a wise servant follower embraces a teachable spirit as we seek out corrective feedback.

15. *Embrace truth telling to provide honest feedback (voice) to protect the integrity of mission achievement and the interests of other key stakeholders, and demonstrate their love for their supervisor by providing input to avoid mistakes.* One of the greatest tests of character in the workplace is mustering the courage to inform superiors of performance problems, interpersonal dynamic dysfunctions, or waste, fraud, and abuse. Can we speak truth to power? This requires great courage under the leading of the Holy Spirit. We must trust the Lord for protection and believe that the “fear of others lays a snare, but one who trusts in the Lord is secure” (Proverbs 29:25).
16. *Practice personal transparency in relation to our weaknesses.* When we appropriately reveal our weaknesses, it demonstrates our humility and trust. Clearly, this practice requires a climate of faith, mutual respect, and confidence in the integrity of coworkers and supervisors. As stated in Scripture, we do not want to “throw [our] pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6) and subject ourselves to needless attack or disadvantage. However, when we are open about our mistakes and problems, it encourages others to practice transparency and improves the climate for innovation and problem solving greatly.
17. *Reject the temptation to externalize blame for problems and assume personal responsibility for creating and solving them.* One of the great enticements is to fault others or external factors for our mistakes and failures. As Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her, and Adam blamed Eve for eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:12–13), humanity is always searching for reasons to avoid responsibility. The key is to first remove the log from our own eye (Matthew 7:5). In effect, servant followers search a situation and reflect on their contributions before addressing other factors, regardless of actual personal responsibility levels.
18. *Be patient and faithful in trials and tribulations and communicate hope and optimism while avoiding complaining, grumbling, and faultfinding.* Be willing to “pay your dues” and wait patiently for the Lord to promote and honor you. When we make the decision to thank God in the midst of our trials and suffering, we are making a very powerful statement that our faith in God’s protection is greater than our belief in the power of the forces arrayed against us. The greatest example of this principle is that of Job in the midst of his trials in which he stated “though he slay me, yet I will trust in him” (Job 13:15, King James Version [KJV]). Another powerful principle is to give to others in the midst of

our troubles: “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psalms 126:5, KJV). One important means for sowing is to thank God for his provision even as we experience the “body blows” of difficult situations. Complaining demonstrates a lower degree of faith and impedes our walk with the Lord.

19. *Learn to live in the present to promote patience and perseverance.* One of the great spiritual warfare tools of Satan is to focus our mental and physical energy on reliving the past or projecting doom, gloom, and fear endlessly into the future. When we permit the past or the future to rule the present, we fail to fully live in the moment and love others. This provides a fertile ground for both pride and fear to rule our emotions and generates powerful forces that deflect our attention from the precious present. When fear and anxiety dominate our thoughts, this torment impedes our ability to solve problems and address the needs of the now. When we nostalgically live in the past, we overlook the problems of those bygone times, the blessings of the present, and the hope of the future. When we live continually for the future, we forget the lessons of the past and the blessings and advantages of the present. We must actively seek to be content in our present situation while praying for the future in faith, pursuing healing from the traumas of the past, and avoiding resting in complacency in the present.
20. *Practice unconditional altruism: help fellow employees in need (mentor and coach new employees, support and assist coworkers) even when inconvenienced or disadvantaged.* Jesus practiced the ministry of interruptions in which he made the choice to step out of the intended plan to help others. This is a key attribute of servant followership. When we make the choice to assist others in spite of the obstacles and costs, it demonstrates our commitment to esteeming others more greatly than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). It also provides the foundation for a Golden Rule workplace in which others take time to help us in our time of need.
21. *Practice courtesy, tact, politeness and confer dignity to all.* Servant followers respect and treat others with gracious and loving esteem. One of the great contributors to workplace stress is the loss of civility and respect for others. Servant followers assume that others are inherently worthy of respect and do not have to earn fair treatment. This foundational Golden Rule attribute reduces tension, defensiveness, and aggressiveness in the workplace. Honoring this principle is especially important during interpersonal conflict and while interacting with difficult personalities. Other employees will be watching, and such principles as

“a soft answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1) will defuse many confrontations.

22. *Practice active listening in which we hear with the heart as well as the mind.* The key is to be content in listening more than we speak. Active listening is a powerful demonstration of “other centeredness” and a manifestation of Golden Rule love. Active listening reinforces—through words, body language, and tone of voice—the importance and high priority attached to the other person’s views and needs, because we intensely concentrate on understanding and developing empathy. Empathy and understanding imply neither agreement with nor the condoning of what others say, but they are a powerful form of humility that rejects overt judgmentalism. Active listening entails paraphrasing to demonstrate understanding, probing to generate enhanced detail (a posture in which we listen more than we speak), not interrupting or making leading statements, and resisting forming rebuttals in our mind while the other person speaks (we can think much faster than we or others can speak).
23. *Support coworkers through encouragement and hold them accountable (tough love).* Servant followers embrace the balance between setting high standards of performance supported by encouragement and grace. Excellence of character entails love in its full form. Discipline and loving feedback constitute a form of love. As Scripture states, God disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12:6). Providing correction with the appropriate motive is a foundational element. When we are dedicated to promoting the best interests of others, irrespective of our personal relationship, it sends a very clear message that we are persons of character and can be trusted.
24. *When in a position of bargaining strength relative to your employer, do not make excessive or unreasonable demands that take advantage of an employer’s vulnerable situation.* Servant followers commit to a long-term employment relationship founded upon trust, and grasp that the relative positions of strength and weakness can change. The goal is to promote the mission and to honor our spiritual job description as Christ’s followers. When we restrain our natural impulses to extract concessions at times of bargaining strength and capitalize on the vulnerabilities of our employers, we demonstrate a commitment to the higher-order Golden Rule principle that God will provide for our needs.
25. *Be uncompromisingly conscientious and honest in using organizational resources (money, time, equipment, supplies, etc.).* When we are faithful in the small things, we earn the trust and confidence

of our employers and those around us. When we resist the temptation to avoid work or use organizational resources for personal gain, we shine brightly and set a tone that encourages others to honor standards of godly conduct.

The challenge is to embrace these attributes from the standpoint of a relationship based on love, not obligation. Servant followers will often pay a high price, but we have faith in the Lord's protection and leave the outcome to the Lord. It is clearly a challenging proposition to embrace a life of trust, but the Christian servant leader character is the foundation of our confidence in the Lord. Servant followers take the road less traveled!

Application Questions

1. How comfortable are you with the concept of servant followership?
2. What are your two main servant follower strengths? What are your two main weaknesses? Develop an action plan to address the weaknesses.
3. What are the greatest obstacles to the practice of servant followership?

CHAPTER 3



BUILDING SERVANT LEADER CHARACTER

THE LEADERSHIP PRODIGAL

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:12–17).

One of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith is that the foundational principles are simple to grasp and communicate, but extremely challenging to practice. Salvation is freely given to all those who confess Jesus as Lord, but confession is an insufficient though necessary condition for achieving the fruits of the Holy Spirit and “working out our salvation with fear and trembling.” It is relatively easy to become a Christian but immensely challenging to live as one. We must struggle against three powerful enemies: the inherently self-centered motives of the flesh, the temptations produced by the worldly idols of success and affirmation, and the presence of spiritual evil.

This profound truth reinforces the challenges of servant leadership in the workplace; the path less traveled. It is a high privilege and daunting responsibility to serve as a mentor and counsel others

regarding the character and competency elements of servant leadership. We stress that competence without character is a silent colony of termites undermining the pillars of our witness, leading to an inevitable structural collapse. We instruct mentees on the twin towers of accountability and encouragement that define Golden Rule love in the workplace. As it states in Scripture, “my people perish for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6), but knowledge alone does not protect us from the gradual erosion of fervor and the dedication to serve others.

A leadership prodigal is a manager who knows the truth, but has abandoned his or her first love for one of four major reasons: (1) the path of expediency in realizing the temptations of obtaining worldly riches (power, fame, promotion, recognition, etc.), (2) succumbing to burnout and “fatigue to the bone”; a form of weariness that is inherent in doing well without adequate rest and boundaries, (3) the “fear of man,” in which we place the approval of others over God and principle, and (4) the blinding influence of pride that extinguishes the light of humility and transparency. The leadership prodigal is in dangerous waters, as indicated in John 13:17: as God pours out blessings if we know the truth and embrace it; conversely, there is a curse if we understand our obligations and choose not to honor them.

How do you know if you are a leadership prodigal? One indicator is the disquiet in our souls as our conscience convicts us. Success born of impure motives or means will always leave a sour taste after the initial sweetness of success subsides. Another indicator is the attitudinal, behavioral, and performance feedback received from peers and subordinates. When there is a significant discrepancy between words and actions, policy and practice, and a hearing and doing gap, employee engagement, passion, and commitment suffer, as trust erodes.

What is the solution when one is lost in the wilderness of the leadership prodigal? The first strategy is prevention, entailing a ruthless and ongoing commitment to identifying and testing the integrity of our motives and actions. We must identify the root cause of our behavior. A journal is an effective means for identifying long-term patterns and changes in our decisions. Secondly, embrace an ongoing commitment to 360-degree appraisal through an accountability partner and mentor who will speak truth into your life. Finally, embrace subordinate and peer appraisals that provide candid feedback on how others perceive our actions. As was the case with the prodigal son (Luke 15), we stray from the straight and narrow, but we possess the blessed assurance that if we take one step toward God, he will come running to us!

Application Questions

1. Leadership is a very challenging process. What is your greatest obstacle in leading others?
2. Develop a strategy to address this obstacle. Provide a simple action plan.
3. What is the greatest threat to effective leadership in general? How can you overcome this obstacle?

A LOG IN THE ROAD

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive (Genesis 50:20, *KJV*).

What is the purpose of pain and suffering in our lives? This existential question is a foundational element of a religious worldview. Christianity posits that in God's economy, none of our life experiences are "wasted." There are no mindless or meaningless moments, even in the midst of the most profoundly troubling life events. As I reflect on the significance of my life and the role of affliction, I find reassurance in one of the great mysteries: the paradoxical balance between my free will decision making and God's omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient management of the universe. I now discern, with crystal clarity, God's fingerprints in the painful and sorrowful moments of my life, both before and after salvation. The concept of God's direct involvement raises many questions, including, does God intervene in every person's life? If so, is the nature of the intervention different for Christians and non-Christians? Scripture is clear that God loves us all equally, is no respecter of persons, and has written eternity and his law in our hearts. Yet there are other Scripture passages that indicate that God selects the saved (Romans 8:29–31) and that many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). Do we really possess free will? What role does God's intervention play in our pre-salvation experience? If God knows in advance whether one will embrace salvation, is there truly freedom to decide? All of these issues are worthy of discussion. However, I raise them not as the epicenter of this discussion, but as presuppositions to the main point: that in God's economy, even our suffering promotes God's will when we trust and embrace him as Lord.

I would like to illustrate this point with two life lessons. The first relates to my thirty-plus years of enduring the suffering produced by anxiety and panic disorder. Praise the Lord that I am delivered from

its pernicious control! I now realize that this hideous weapon formed against me—a condition that I would not wish on my worst enemy, a condition that imprisons mind, body, and spirit and dominates every waking thought and haunts our sleep and dreams—is a “gift” of the satanic anointing; a foretaste of hell in the experience of dread, darkness, hopelessness, and despair. However, this satanic weapon was ironically the instrument of my salvation. What the enemy meant for evil, God used for good (Genesis 50:20). Without the panic disorder, I would have been, in all likelihood, a self-righteous, self-sufficient, smug atheist/agnostic reveling in my rebellious state. I exhausted every worldly remedy, but like the thief on the cross, I finally chose to humble myself at its foot. The ultimate decision comes down to whom we trust with our pain and suffering. Do we embrace worldly sorrow, or do we cast our suffering on Jesus who turns mourning into joy? I do not state these words lightly, given the depth of the misery that humans experience, but like the apostle Paul, I understand this: “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure!” (2 Corinthians 4:17) What would it have profited me to have gained all manner of worldly success, but lose my soul (Matthew 16:26)? I thank the Lord for my pain and suffering that led me to Christ, who bears all of our infirmities and sins.

A second example relates to the workplace. A workplace termination for any reason or cause can be a very traumatic and humiliating experience, especially if one manifests prideful perfectionistic tendencies. I completed my Masters in Public Administration degree with a 4.0 average and obtained an excellent entry-level career position as a human resources representative at a paper mill in Alabama. Things were moving forward, and I was on one of my “lulls” from the panic attacks. There are many career lessons related to my experience, but the most profound one related to that final interview as the plant manager terminated me. The “straw” that broke the camel’s back related to what I considered to be a “minor” job duty. As personnel representative, I coordinated the recognition events for work teams that exhibited zero accidents for a designated time. Working in a paper mill is dangerous, and safety is a life and death issue. When work teams avoid injuries, there is great pride and joy for both rank-and-file and management. At one of these events, the recognition cake did not arrive from the bakery. As personnel representative, I had completed all of my required duties for the event, and I was too busy socializing with other employees to notice that the men and the supervisor were

greatly upset. It was not in my job description, so why be concerned? I was too oblivious to notice the consternation and anger of the supervisor. Later that week, on a Saturday, the plant manager called me into his office. He politely but firmly stated that they must reluctantly terminate me for ongoing performance deficiencies including my lack of “common sense” and initiative related to the “cake” incident. He left me with words that forever will be with me. He said, “Gary, what you did at the recognition event is like driving down a rainy road at night in the midst of a storm. You see a large log in the road in the middle of your lane and are able to stop and drive around it. You miss it, but what about the next person? What if that person was your wife or daughter? You could have stopped and cleared that log and saved a life.” Those words resonated in my spirit, and humbled me in a profound manner. I was crushed by the termination, and it led to one of my most debilitating periods of anxiety and panic, but as I reached a low point in the flesh it removed another “prop” of support and that ultimately led to the day of salvation. Ultimately, upon reflection, I learned powerful life lessons that benefit me to this day. When I see debris or road hazards, I stop and clear them, or call the emergency road hazard number. Logs in the road are in my job description, just like Jesus taught us in the parable of the Good Samaritan. I admit that I do not stop at every road hazard, but I take action when I can and pray for other “good Samaritan” laborers to finish the job. At work, I am cognizant of the “road hazards” and strive to take responsibility for problems that I did not make, but in which I can help others. As servant followers and leaders, solving problems and helping others is a perpetual and eternal duty. Again, the weapon that the enemy formed against me did not prosper, as I learned powerful lessons. May the Lord help you gain pearls of great value from the trials in your life, and embrace the wonderful promise of Romans 8:28: all things work out for the best for those who love God and are called according to his purposes.

Application Questions

1. How has God gained your attention through suffering? How have you grown through the experience?
2. Do you believe that all suffering produces good in the end if we trust God? Why or why not?
3. What is the most valuable lesson that you have learned through suffering, which you can share with others?

REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIAN SERVANT LEADER CHARACTER BUILDING

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Romans 5:1–5)

One of the main duties of our Christian “job description” is the development of godly character. The development of Christ-like character requires a lifelong process of consecration, enabling and empowering the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit as we work toward our salvation with fear and trembling. Below are reflections on how God uses our workplace experiences in this “trial by fire” character-building process:

- *The development of humility:* The greater our knowledge, maturity, and responsibility levels, the greater the standards of character accountability. The more I learn, know, and grow, the greater the difficulty in living a life of wisdom and “practicing what I preach.” This reflects the powerful and godly principle that knowledge frequently outstrips our application capacity, given the omnipresent deficiencies in our character and wisdom levels, and most importantly, the inherently corrupting nature of success through self-sufficiency, complacency and, ultimately, pride. The only appropriate response is an attitude of humility, recognizing that all of our successes are due to God's generous provision, grace, and protection. One key element is the practice of God-directed transparency, the action side of humility producing great fruits. How can we be humble when we fail to authentically interact and communicate a realistic view of ourselves in all settings, weaknesses and everything else? The practice of transparency is very difficult, given our fleshly impulse to hide our flaws and the need to control how others view us given the risks of disclosing weakness. However, the absence of transparency grants the devil permission to attack us with condemnation and shame as we live in fear of discovery. In addition, there is great freedom and peace when we discard the crushing weight required to maintain the façade of command and control.

- *Workplace trials are a blessing as they increase our trust and reliance on God, perfecting our patience, perseverance, and the ability to engage in servant leader love.* Irrespective of how well we handle the trials, God will reveal great truths to better equip us for the future. We will face great temptations born of spiritual warfare to renounce our inheritance and adopt worldly standards and a return to “slavery in Egypt.” It requires great strength of character to be as “wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove” (Matthew 10:16).
- *An important lesson is that judgmentalism in any form blinds us to the log in our own eye.* Like moths drawn to a flame, we see the weaknesses of others, but we fail to visualize and grasp the breadth, depth, and power of our own sins and imperfections. From a spiritual standpoint, the human tendency is “far sightedness,” in which we clearly discern the weaknesses and sins of others while possessing blurred vision when gazing upon ourselves in our mind’s eye. We use distorted lenses, with the most common tendency to demand “justice” for others and grace or mercy for our weaknesses and sins. The tendency to externalize and rationalize blame and responsibility is a common pattern of Adam and Eve’s original sin.
- *The commitment to pray for supervisors is a God-honoring form of servant followership.* Managers have great responsibilities, and we all benefit when our boss completes his or her duties with godly excellence. It is important that our supervisor, in turn, earns the trust, confidence, and respect of their supervisor and other key organizational stakeholders, thereby ensuring “upward influence.” When managers are in the “out-group,” subordinates frequently suffer, given the diminished fiscal, informational, and emotional resource support. Hence, it is an essential Golden Rule attribute to take joy when our supervisors succeed and be sorrowful when they struggle and fail. Our prayers of support demonstrate our ability to esteem others greater than ourselves, even when we are disadvantaged.
- *Hasty workplace decisions “short circuit” the dialogue needed to receive guidance from the Lord.* Oftentimes we still receive communication from the Holy Spirit in the form of a disquiet or unease, but in our zeal we choose to ignore these subtle forms of communication. I (and my family as a result) have suffered greatly for my past employment decisions when I failed to heed the Holy Spirit’s counsel and prompting. I have prematurely left good job positions before the Lord’s release. We must learn to listen through intense prayer followed by consulting the wisdom of godly counselors for essential guidance in making decisions. Before a decision is made, it is important to have agreement between four elements: (1) the action’s

consistency with the word of God in Scripture, (2) the inner peace and witness of the Holy Spirit, (3) the guidance and wisdom of godly counselors, and finally (4) the Rhema (God's personal communication to us) word of God through the trend of circumstances.

- *The importance of patience reinforces that we can run from painful areas that promote sanctification and character growth, but we cannot hide.* Patience is a foundational character element along with humility and empathy. We simply add more time in the wilderness when we act hastily as we “go around the mountain” one more time. In addition, patience is a foundational element of our relationship with others. Without patience, we are unable to practice ministry and take the necessary time to understand the pains and problems of others hidden with the many “fig leaves” used to cover wounds, sins, and pain.
- *The absence of godly character will sabotage all of our gifts, abilities, and accomplishments.* It is like a cancer that destroys us from the inside. Without Christian servant leader character and the integrity of means, ends, and motives, our work efforts are unauthorized (Matthew 7:23) and based upon fleshly motives that will not stand the test of God's judgment (1 Corinthians 3:11–3:15). Hence, it is important to seek self-knowledge regarding our motives through ongoing prayer, reflection, and fellowship with mentors and confessors. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we “put to death the deeds of our sinful nature.” (Romans 8:13)
- *We must be willing to suffer persecution and endure uncertain temporal outcomes.* When faced with workplace trials and persecution, it is tempting to engage in “worldly sorrow” and believe the lie that God has abandoned us and we are alone, as Elijah experienced after his conflict with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). Elijah falsely believed that the battle was his alone, leading to depression and fear after the great success. Oftentimes the benefits of our actions do not bear fruit until years later, after we have left the organization.

God views us not as we are, but sees us through the eyes of eternity and our redeemed and blood-washed forgiven state. We are moving along the road of dying to the self. As Joyce Meyer states, we should thank God for the fact that we may not be where we want to be, but give God glory and praise for where we are and how far we have come and where we are going! To God be the Glory! “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13).

Application Questions

1. Discuss how your workplace trials have influenced your humility. Have they changed your level of transparency? Why or why not?
2. How would you characterize your own level of judgmentalism when it comes to others? How can you resist the temptation to “rush to judgment?”
3. How can you help your supervisor be more effective at his or her job? Make a commitment to pray for your supervisor.
4. Recall a situation in which you were persecuted in one form or another. How well did you cope? How could you improve next time in handling the situation?

CHAPTER 4



SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

LIFE HARMONY, SEASONS OF BATTLE AND PEACE

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2).

As servant leaders, we are faced with many challenges in promoting a work/life balance. However, there is a hidden challenge in the well-meaning literature and research that emphasizes this often elusive concept, and that is in the inherent complexity and unpredictability of life. Balance is best achieved in systems that are relatively stable and predictable, and the demands on our lives are seldom neatly organized and compartmentalized. Another important question relates to whether or not the notion is biblical. As Pastor John Ortberg noted in his outstanding book *The Life you Have Always Wanted* (2002), the goal is not balance, but harmony based upon seasons. If you examine the leadership ministries of Jesus and the apostles, you see a commitment first to obeying the Lord's direction in the forms of seasons of life. The apostle Paul endured long periods of work, imprisonment, sleepless nights, hunger, and cold. Jesus devoted whole nights to prayer and service and even worked on the Sabbath at times. What am I recommending? There are levels of balance within the various life domains that define the seasons of our lives. Hence, it is important to commit to the following practices.

God, Self-Care, Family, and Community

1. Commit to spending a daily block of time with God. The term “spiritual discipline” is the common term, but it is very easy to regress to a legalistic “checklist” approach that generates pride, guilt, and a false sense of complacency if we are meeting our time-bound goals for prayer, fasting, and Scripture reading. However, they are all vital to loving God and being in an authentic relationship. The goal here is to set general targets, but allow for flexibility and change.
2. Commit to regular church attendance and membership in a small group.
3. Devote a daily block of time to self-care through exercise, recreation, sleep (at least 7 hours for most people), and proper nutrition. It is important to “unplug ourselves” and in our respective life domains, engage in the requisite levels of physical activity as well as allow time for enjoying God’s gifts of the natural and man-made world.
4. Devote a daily block of time to family and relationships. It is essential to honor our commitment to God by loving our spouses, children, and other relatives.
5. Commit time on a monthly basis to a nonprofit or community-based charity in your area of interest.

Work Domain

1. Honor the Sabbath and take one full day per week from all work-related duties.
2. Ensure that you pace yourself throughout the workday. This entails taking frequent rest and walking breaks and utilizing a regular lunch away from work.
3. Take all available paid time off, including vacation time and holidays.
4. Limit work hours to a designated weekly target. For most, that would be forty hours, but for some occupations it will be greater.
5. Set work and home boundaries to ensure that all paid time off receives minimal or no work interruptions.

I remain a work in progress in these areas, and have made more improvement in some of these domains than in others. The great challenge is not in identifying or developing knowledge, but overcoming the many blatant and subtle internal and external obstacles to their practice.

When seasons of enhanced demands develop in one life area, it is important to receive the guidance of the Lord on where and how to reduce investments in the other life domains. If personal caregiving

responsibilities increase, we need to reduce work investments strategically. The goal is not to completely eliminate investment in these areas, but to reduce the frequency and the amount of time devoted. A concept that I recommend for my students is that of “satisficing.” This is a term from Nobel Prize–winning economist Herbert Simon and refers to the need to prioritize time and effort levels based upon priority and available resources. I tell my students that if your family caregiving responsibilities increase for a prolonged period, the amount of time and effort devoted to schoolwork should be reduced. In other words, redefine what you consider your “best” is, given resource constraints. Under the new set of demands, your best efforts may result in the goal of a “B” grade instead of an “A” and devoting the extra time to the family. Unless we are willing to adjust to the new season, the old balanced system becomes an increasing drain on energy. We can only “burn the candle at both ends” for a limited period.

It is important for servant leaders to model a commitment to harmony in order to avoid tempting employees to emulate your level of work effort at the expense of their health and family wellbeing. You may be able to work sixty hours or more, but these periods of high demand should be only for a short period, followed by a season of rest and a return to a more sustainable schedule. If work demands are too high, the organization tempts employees to steal time from family, self-care, or the community. Take the path less traveled, and strive for harmony.

We must make time for the simple but profoundly important elements that are the heartbeat of God, which is time spent in loving God and others. Modern life presents the continual temptation to substitute activity over being by the need to prove our spiritual mettle with works. “Busyness” disconnects us from the vine and the life-giving presence and voice of the Holy Spirit. A hectic level of activity promotes legalism, a spirit of works, and a spirit of pride as we are unable to discern the best from the good. Our frenetic activity level leaves us vulnerable to compassion fatigue, discouragement, and an absence of joy. We become vulnerable to all forms of temptation given that we are not walking closely with our first love. When we operate under our own power and authority, we alternate between pride and fear, impatience and procrastination. The key factor is to ask the Lord to identify our root motive for what we do. We must rest in the spirit of grace if our motives are to flow from God’s perfect will. The challenge is to separate the “best from the good.” Clearly, this requires seeking God’s guidance and obeying his instructions by defining the true “best” elements. God frequently brings us to the end of our

personal resources to snap our lethargy and spirit of self-sufficiency and to show our need for godly margin. I understand how frustrating and painful such a time of overload represents (both in a physical and emotional setting), but this weapon that the enemy formed against us will not prosper if we repent and commit to God's plan. I pray for the liberating presence of the Holy Spirit to guide your steps as you "right-size."

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your total set of life demands? In harmony, balanced, chaotic, or somewhere in between?
2. What adjustments do you need to make in order to restore harmony to your life?
3. What explicit action steps will you take in one specific area to restore harmony?

DISCIPLESHIP MAKING: THE CHURCH AND EQUIPPING THE BELIEVER

Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters (Colossians 3:23).

The Church's view of work is a major component of a biblical "world-view" belief system. Is work a form of slavery, drudgery, and a necessary evil, or is it another means to glorify and worship God? Our answers to these questions are very important in our journey toward Christ-likeness. Below are reflections on key elements of how the Church can equip the believer in the workplace.

- *In order for us to represent Christ as workplace ambassadors, we must demonstrate in word and deed that Christianity entails a changed worldview that transforms hearts and minds one person at a time, beginning with ourselves.* The workplace is a wonderful setting in which to demonstrate unconditional love.
- *Many churches promote a de facto life compartmentalization approach and a false dual nature of reality: church on Sunday, and "work and live like a heathen" on the other six days.* The Lord is the center of all life domains, and any separation is a form of rebellion from loving the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. The key is that we worship and love

God 24/7 through our motives, emotions, thoughts, words, and deeds. The exact nature of this worship varies depending upon the setting, but Golden Rule agape love is the foundation for all. How can the church better equip the believer for the workplace? One important element is reinforcing that work is sacred, and an important avenue for worshipping the Lord. As stated in Colossians 3:23, we are not working for men, but for God who sees all of our internal and external motives and actions. A second key element is an integrated program of workplace ministry. How should Christians behave in the workplace? This entails guidance through sermons and teaching, workplace ministry small groups, and workplace spiritual intelligence training.

- *Many pastors are far removed from the workplace and lack any professional experiences outside of the ministry.* One avenue for overcoming this gap is for pastors to develop work/life ministries headed by mature Christians with significant workplace integration experience. A major factor is educating pastors at the seminary regarding the practical elements of theology.
- *A sobering reality from my personal experience and that of many other believers is the absence of a significant difference between secular and faith-based work environments.* This result is not surprising given that heart-based sanctification growth remains the path less traveled. We can be a saved Christian, but still subject to the same strongholds. The great temptation for new workers in the Christian ministry is to avoid “worldly sorrow” born of a sense of disappointment and even betrayal. Hypocrisy is the sin that Jesus most vehemently attacked, given its power to shipwreck the faith of our coworkers—our workplace flock.
- *The believer needs to be equipped by the church to witness in the workplace.* In witnessing in the workplace, it is important to establish the basic Kingdom Principle of trust based upon relationship credibility, the belief that the person doing the communicating is operating from a motive of love. The sad truth is that many non-Christians believe that power, judgment, and control motivate believers; a convenient but compelling rationale for discrediting Christianity. The troubling reality is that many Christians operate from this paradigm, and we must demonstrate in word and deed a different spirit of excellence, grace, and love that will break down the defenses.
- *We must establish an emotional bond with coworkers based upon trust, respect, and godly love.* The Holy Spirit within us will provide witness at the spirit level, and then once a relationship is developed, it will present opportunities for explicit evangelization. In a secular

workplace managers must be very careful to avoid mandatory or quasi-mandatory (the belief that attendance is expected) discipleship efforts that impose religious beliefs, leading to a counter spirit of rebellion. Preach the gospel in a respectful, considerate, and noncoercive fashion to honor the principle of free will.

- *Fear in the workplace creates a double-minded spirit.* That is why fear is one of the most powerful tools of the devil. It is important to recognize that courage is not the absence of fear, but persisting and obeying God in its presence. The devil will use the lie that we must extinguish all fear to be worthy. That is another falsehood from the pit of hell, as only God's perfect love casts out all fear, not our self-efforts. God hopes that we will trust him irrespective of the circumstances and our feelings. A workplace based upon fear produces the spirit reflected in the parable of the talents. We bury the gifts God gives us because we are afraid of the punishment that comes with mistakes. Management by fear inhibits our God-given creativity attributes and produces a climate of compassion fatigue in which we are too tired or fearful to step outside of our protected zone and help others. We then become like the religious leader in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) who passes by the wounded in his path. If we judge others and penalize them for their mistakes, we deny the grace that we so desperately desire for ourselves. Those who are extremely driven and in a state of condemnation will reproduce a workplace environment in which successful performance is the only acceptable outcome, rejecting the more important elements of long-term character growth that promotes personal and organizational mission achievement.
- *Perfection of accomplishment is not what God desires: it is excellence of heart and character that pleases God the most.* We must strive for excellence—but godly excellence—which means that we must not only do the right thing in the right way, but for the right reasons. As the apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13, we can speak with tongues of angels, have faith to move mountains, and give our bodies to be burned, but without love, it profits us nothing. If our motive is to be perfect to earn God's approval or the applause of men, we are laboring for the wrong reason. God does not ask us to be perfect in our work, only to place him at the center and obey his call. There are no style points in the Kingdom, only a heart test. When we are hurt or threatened in the workplace, the frustrations will tempt us to embrace “worldly sorrow” and the associated fleshly impulses of anger, bitterness, and lack of forgiveness, which lead to actions of retribution and vengeance. When the instrument of our

pain is those in leadership positions in the ministry, the sting is even more intense. We must cast our worldly sorrow on the Lord and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, embrace an attitude of forgiveness, which is the only approach that frees us from the torment of reliving the agony and pain of the hurt.

Keep up your well doing! May the Lord provide his ongoing blessings and protection. As it states in Psalm 127:1, unless the Lord is the master builder of our home, we labor in vain.

Application Questions

1. Is your definition of success the same as God's? Provide thoughtful reflection. Provide evidence to support your current belief and action system without condemnation.
2. How well does your church equip you for the workplace? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your church's workplace ministry? How can your church better support workplace believers?
3. How does fear influence your present workplace? How can fear be reduced in your life and that of others? Provide a short action plan.

IDENTITY: OUR CALLING IN CHRIST

Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called (1 Corinthians 7:20).

As Christian workplace leaders, we are engaged in character education to better equip ourselves and others to realize God's calling and purpose in our lives. Character education is clearly more than instrumental to career development. Ideally, our careers reinforce God's perfect will for our lives and our unique gifts, talents, and purpose. What are some of the key elements of a Christ-centered career development process?

- One important element is the practice of patience and an ongoing personal relationship through the Holy Spirit to hear the Lord's voice. One of the great enemies of achieving our calling is that we are pain-, trial-, and tribulation-averse and therefore are unwilling to pay the price of spiritual warfare to endure the attacks of an enemy who is attempting to thwart us from discerning, agreeing, believing, and living our life in accordance with God's will and purpose. I have made the mistake of assuming that suffering or problems indicate

that I am on the wrong path, when God's goal for me is to learn to trust him at a higher level. Joseph (Genesis 39–40) is a great example of this, as he experienced the trials of prison and God's promise seemed very distant. Through the pain, God revealed the plan in all its glory. As my spiritual mentor states, we will miss God's call if we confuse the wilderness preparation for the fulfillment of his purpose.

- Another important element is recognizing that the Spirit's guidance does not always conform to human wisdom and logic in our journey of career development. When we lean on our own understanding, we substitute our reasoning and logic with it and displace God's guidance. We tend to think in a linear fashion, while the Lord's thoughts are in terms of interconnecting multidimensional systems transcending the limitations of time and space. We see darkly into the spiritual realm, while the Lord anticipates all of the variables. As Scripture states, he is a "lamp unto our feet" (Psalm 119:105), and a lamp provides light that penetrates only a few feet into the darkness.
- It is important to search for evidence from reliable sources regarding the nature of those of our gifts that are essential for fully realizing our calling. Satan attempts to discourage or deceive us about the nature and use of our gifts with the goal of either burying them, or if that does not work, to use our gifts in an inappropriate manner. When I was a freshman in college I took the Strong Vocational Interest test and discovered, much to my chagrin, that my two highest professions were teaching and the ministry, a strange combination for an atheist! I realize now that Satan used the anxiety and panic disorder to saddle me with fears and insecurities to keep me from using the talents and gifts God gave me. I thank the Lord that I somehow was able to move forward in spite of my fears in such areas as public speaking, until the Lord began to deliver and illuminate. My point is that we have many gifts that remain dormant until the appropriate time, and this occurs at all ages. To God be the glory! We often fall into the trap of trying to live somebody else's life. A major element of spiritual warfare is for the devil to tempt us to use our gifts to disobey God, with the great example being the temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness.
- The Academy Award-winning film *Chariots of Fire* (1982) illustrates that when we operate within our gift and calling zones, time stands still and work becomes an act of godly worship, joy, and play as we truly enter the eternal realm and the Kingdom and the presence of God shakes our temporal anchors. When our job appropriately utilizes our gifts, the Holy Spirit propels us forward. It is much easier to increase performance in an area of strength from good to

excellent than in an area of weakness from a “D” to a “C.” It truly is a joy to operate in the gift “zone” that God has designed for us. As Richard Bolles (2005) states in his small but powerful book *How to Find Your Mission in Life*, when we operate using our gifts, our drive to express our gifts meets an unmet need in others. In other words, if we fail to operate within our gifts, we deny others the blessings of what only we can provide! This is another manifestation of God’s love as he gave each one of us the means to bring hope and joy to others.

- We often have second thoughts even with a job in our calling and gifts. This is a common pattern after the initial euphoria and challenge of the position wears off and is similar to the challenges we face as new Christians, in which we burn with a great emotional zeal that gradually dissipates and we must rise to the challenge of choosing to love God in a deeper and more mature way. God will use all of your experiences to perfect you for further service and character development, the wheat with the chaff, the good with bad, the joyful with the sorrowful. The joy of career development lies in discovering what we are and what we are not! One of the worst positions in life is to assume the role of an actor filling an unwanted role.
- The goal is to enter into our calling and harness the joy, passion, and associated gifts to bless others. There are instances in which our passions lie in areas such as caregiving, which provides little or no income opportunities. However, God will always find unexpected and creative ways for a person to realize their passion and receive an income. For example, let’s assume that your greatest joy was organic cooking and baking for the family. The Lord may lead you to start a home business in which you sell the organic baked goods from your home. As Scripture states, God will not let his children beg for bread!

To God be the Glory! As it states in Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.”

Application Questions

1. Have you found your calling in life? What evidence supports your belief (from personal experience, the feedback of others, etc.)? Provide examples.
2. What are a few of your spiritual and natural gifts? How are they being used on the job?
3. What are the greatest obstacles to using your gifts as God designed? How can these barriers be overcome?

HEARING FROM GOD

The Lord reinforces in us, as servant leaders, the ongoing importance of following the lead of the Holy Spirit. A recent incident clearly illustrates this point. One of my volunteer contributions to the community is to pick up trash on my morning runs and walks. I saw a piece of garbage on the other side of the road, and I had to make a decision to either remain on my planned path, or veer off course. It is desirable to go off course at times and to reject rigid and obsessive routines, but conversely, it is important to recognize that the piece of trash on the other side could be a temptation to distract us from staying on the route and completing our mission. I debated within my mind as to which course was appropriate. I decided to remain on course, and providentially, a woman approached me about her lost cats. I was not able to help her locate her cats, but the Holy Spirit prompted me to pray for her. Had I gone off course, I would not have had this opportunity. Hence, the key factor is to ask God for guidance and know that staying true or changing course is equally desirable. There is no condemnation for either way whether we take it or miss it, but praying before helps us set the correct priorities and actions, enabling us both to avoid being distracted, but also to practice the ministry of interruptions. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your ability to hear from the Lord in terms of your ability to choose what path to take?
2. What are the obstacles to hearing clearly from God?
3. How would you help a friend hear God more clearly?

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO YOU, PART I

For the wisdom of this world is *foolishness* in God's sight. As it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness' (1 Corinthians 3:19).

God is infinitely beautiful, and one of his wonderfully exquisite and delightful attributes is how he uses his creative power to fashion and love us in a unique and inimitable fashion. The paradox is that we are all the same and one in love and grace in Christ, but created with distinctive attributes and gifts to complete our unique calling and mission. As a social scientist, I am humbled at how God has used the

vocabulary of my profession to communicate his love to me. I would like to share several of those principles with you.

Principle 1: There is sufficient evidence on all sides (pro, con, and unsure) for the existence of God, providing believers, unbelievers, and the confused with adequate evidence to support their personal beliefs. However, all perspectives in this debate possess one element in common, that of the absence of complete evidentiary certainty, given missing evidence; hence, there is an element of faith interjected within each of the respective views. God earnestly desires a voluntary relationship that reflects the yearning of our hearts to commune with him. Based upon God's provision of free will, God permits humanity to accept, reject, or be puzzled and confused regarding his reality. The presence of rival hypotheses (alternative explanations) for the same event supports either a spiritual or a natural explanation. For every manifestation of God, an observer can posit other explanations that entail nonsupernatural forces. This returns us to the foundational principle of free will. A very clear example is the conferral of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2). Different observers assessing the same event attributed different casual factors to the "speaking in tongues." To the skeptic, the logical explanation was drunkenness, which Peter rebutted by stating that it was morning and too early for drunkenness. Ultimately, we choose which reality to believe based upon the desires of our heart (Romans 10:9). We all must serve a higher power, and it is our choice as to whether we serve the Creator or an aspect of creation such as logic or reason. When we surrender our heart to Jesus, we acknowledge our incompleteness and our utter and total inability to address our sin nature and meet our needs for eternal and pure fellowship, support, and direction from a power greater than our own, and hence a free expression of love. We believe with our heart, given that it reflects the eternal elemental desires of our inner being, while the intellect and emotions are transitory and subject to deception and confusion.

Principle 2: God employs the principle of triangulation (providing multiple sources of evidence and perspectives) in demonstrating his reality and presence. The first means is through the evidence surrounding the intelligent design of the universe (Hebrews 11:3). More and more atheistic scientists are embracing a belief in God based upon discoveries in cosmology, astronomy, physics, genetics, and neurobiology. The second means is through the truth and power of the spoken and written word of God (Hebrews 4:12). An incontrovertible fact is the Bible's universality and scope of impact in changing lives across time, cultures, and languages. The third is the personal revelational

knowledge (signs and wonders) that God reveals in the life of the believer (Acts 2:43). These small and great life events manifest the active presence of God in circumstances and interactions with others. They range from the mundane to the miraculous. The key is that one will begin to discern a pattern of intricately interconnected events—large and small—that demonstrate supernatural intervention. Any one of these events can be attributed to coincidental chance factors and/or a rival causal hypothesis, but, when analyzed together, the “pathway” of God’s active intervention is discerned. The cumulative probability of these incidents manifesting a random cause is very low for any one series of these events. The probability decreases based upon the cumulative experience of many of these interrelated sequences of events over the lifetime of a believer. God reveals truth in our lives line by line, precept by precept (Zechariah 4:10). The odds become lower when you consider this pattern is descriptive of the experiences of millions of other Christians throughout history. God reveals his presence in small and mighty ways when we seek him. Psalm 37:23–24 speaks to this: “Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when He delights in our way; though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand. The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord, He delights in every detail of their lives.” The fourth is the product of a faith in God, the evidence of transformed lives, and its “fruits” of healed and restored physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing (Romans 12:2). If we search for God with an honest heart, even if we possess doubts or questions, God will reveal himself in great and small ways. He will provide us with the desires of our heart.

Principle 3: The cosmological evidence for the “Big Bang” reinforces the infinite creative power and complexity of God. From the subatomic to the cosmological level, we find a balanced universe at an incredibly complicated level of precision. Our finely-tuned universe has a beginning; hence, a formative causal process brought our universe into being. Our universe demonstrates that fine-tuning is the foundation for life. The genetic complexity of even the simplest single-celled organism reinforces the unique role of every living life form within the earth’s eco-system. No human being is genetically the same, and even with similar environmental influences, produces infinite variety. The same is true of inanimate objects such as mineral crystals and snowflakes, with each possessing similar physical and chemical properties, but individualization of specific structural attributes. Famous atheists such as British philosopher Anthony Flew have now abandoned their naturalistic view of the origin of the universe, as illustrated by this

quote from a United Press International (UPI) story by Uwe Siemon-Netto (2005):

As British philosopher Anthony Flew, once as hard-nosed a humanist as any, mused when turning his back on his former belief: It is, for example, impossible for evolution to account for the fact that one single cell can carry more data than all the volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica put together.

For the objective observer, it requires more faith to believe in random forces than a creative God. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. Do you possess doubts about the existence of God? If so, you are in good company, even among strong believers. What are your personal sources of evidence for the existence of God? How compelling are they?
2. How can you help yourself cope with and address any doubts that you have about God's existence?
3. How would you answer a coworker's doubts about God's existence?

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO YOU, PART II

Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

Our faith-based journey continues with Part II of how God speaks to you. The key to approaching God is with a humble heart and mindset. I have received greater peace by accepting that I am neither God's lawyer nor a scientist charged with "proving" my claim or hypothesis. I need only be a witness to God's presence in my life. It is in this spirit that I provide additional reflections on how God bears testimony in my thought life.

Principle 1: Atheism and agnosticism reject reliance on knowledge that cannot be directly or indirectly verified by science. Many social and natural scientists conclude that religion serves several key functions, including a means for reducing life stress produced by knowledge of our own mortality and the inability to control the complex variables of life (Koenig, 2008). Hence, religion is primarily a psychological coping mechanism to reduce mental and physical stress and an instrument for social control. By assuming in our vain and rationalistic

mindset that there is no God, we are concluding that all present and future knowledge is a product of four central information-generating methods: (1) human reason, (2) our senses, (3) scientific research, and (4) human imagination. If we do not presently understand the origins and foundational principles underlying alleged “spiritual” phenomena, we will discover their naturalistic origin and nature in the near future. This view implies that we can understand the infinite, which is the height of vanity for finite creations, given that we cannot by definition, no matter how much science progresses, grasp what is beyond the physical universe. No matter how advanced we become, we remain embedded in a created system, and possess limitations of cognition, time, and space, hence our understanding will always be incomplete. The “parts” of a system cannot completely grasp the whole. God uses natural laws to realize his will, endowing us with reasoning powers that permit us to understand the components of reality. No one can make the claim that there is no God (Psalm 53:1) and maintain the façade of objectivity.

Principle 2: The universal worship of God is a reflection that humans are “hard-wired” to experience religious and spiritual states. The Scriptures state this plainly, that God placed the desire to achieve transcendence (eternity) into our being (Ecclesiastes 3:11), the yearning to connect with the infinite, and the universal human need to find purpose, meaning, and transcendence. If God created man in his own image, it is logical to assume that the ability to experience spiritual states and communicate with God would be genetically determined, and this is what science is confirming. Research is exploring the existence of the “God” gene, the neurology of prayer and spiritual states, and the universality of human religious expression (Hamer, 2004; Newberg & Waldman, 2009). A great deal of research work demonstrates the efficacy of prayer and religious belief in promoting a whole host of mental and physical wellbeing outcomes (Koenig, 2008). Psychology, traditionally the most atheistic of social sciences, is incorporating more religious and spiritual treatment protocols given the cumulative research evidence (Routledge, 2009).

Principle 3: The obstacles to faith can be overcome with understanding and humility. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). The major blockages to faith are pride, the intellect, pain and suffering, and an unforgiving nature. A dysfunctional family environment in which the parents, and especially the father, neglect or are physically or emotionally abusive, creates a distrust of earthly unconditional love, and generates cynicism regarding the existence, or even the possibility, of a pure, unconditional heavenly love. A great

book on this subject is *The Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* by Paul C. Vitz (1999). We learn to be distrustful of claims of earthly authority, thereby, by extension, transferring to the spiritual. We are afraid of being hurt, of being conned, or looking foolish, so we build barriers to faith. We become cynical and hardened, and assume “guilty until proven innocent,” allowing distrust to bias our decision making process, creating destructive self-fulfilling prophecies injurious to our relationships with others. Another barrier is pride and our unwillingness to be held accountable to a higher power. Many resist God because they want to live their lives according to their own standards and desires. There is a path that appears to be correct, but it ends in disaster (Proverbs 16:25). What is the root of your questions? Is it hard-hearted resistance to the idea of serving someone beyond the self, or is it an honest search for the truth? Imagine for a second if Christianity is true, that God provides forgiveness for our sins and grants us in return, eternal life, peace, joy, wholeness, forgiveness, contentment, and the true desires of our heart. As Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 2:9, “But, as it is written, ‘No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.’” The only logical approach to God is to assume a humble mindset that reduces reliance on antiseptic intellectual proof and embraces a holistic and broad-based search for the truth. May the Lord continue his ongoing restoration of your heart and mind.

Application Questions

1. What in your experience are the most difficult obstacles to faith? How can they be overcome?
2. What sources of evidence support the belief that God has “written eternity in our hearts” and that the need to connect with a higher power is ingrained in humanity?
3. How would you approach a coworker who believes that only science can produce legitimate knowledge?

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO YOU, PART III

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief (Mark 9:24, *KJV*)

I hope that each day brings a greater revelation of how God uses the tools of our trade to speak to us. As Os Hillman (2000, July 6) notes,

Jesus used the language of work to convey great spiritual truths. I now recognize God's revelation in all areas of my intellectual labors. As we mature as believers, the following principles seem like reviewing the alphabet, but I realize that my level of knowledge exceeds both my memory and my ability to apply what I learned. Periodically returning to the foundational principles of the faith makes it less likely to forget what we know. Below are three basic principles.

Principle 1: God will provide you with the faith to believe. One question to pose to an unbeliever is to imagine if Christianity's claims of eternity would be true, would these be the desires of their heart? Can you dare to believe and seek a future that provides blessings beyond your comprehension? Do you have a tiny amount (a "mustard seed" in biblical terms) of courage to seek this? If the answer is yes, you have enough faith to believe, because Scripture says that we believe with our heart (Romans 10:9). God implants in all of us the ability to believe in him, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." (Hebrews 12:2). What if I lack even a modicum of faith? The answer is clear here as well. As was mentioned before, God endows humanity with the desire for spiritual experiences in some form. Even if you do not believe, ask God for the faith to believe. If God is real, and he is, you will receive an answer. A great example of this is Mark 9:24: When a man with a demon-possessed son had lost all hope of healing, he tried all the known secular remedies, and even took him to Jesus' disciples. They failed as well. He met Jesus, and as a desperate and fearful parent exclaimed (Mark 9:22–24), "'From childhood . . . it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' Jesus said to him, 'If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief.'" Jesus healed the boy in spite of the father's double-mindedness. God graciously provides the strength to believe in spite of our doubts.

Principle 2: The mind and emotions will gradually align themselves with the spiritual truth that God is real, and Jesus is a personal, loving, and forgiving God. It matters not what your emotions and intellect are telling you, as the desires of your heart reveal the truth. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7:7) "Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you." (James 4:8) The decision is yours. Do you want the opportunity to experience a peace that passes all understanding, a joy that transcends circumstances, freedom from guilt and

condemnation, a greater ability to experience, give and receive love, and best of all, the assurance of eternal life in a place of infinite bliss? You will find peace and rest from your own labors (Hebrews 4:10). I understand that the Christian message seems foolish, a fairy tale, a dream. However, God uses the foolish things to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27), and no one can find peace, meaning, and transcendence by intellect alone. The most important decision any of us will ever make is the answer to a series of questions: Is God real and does he love me? Can I trust him? Is he a personal God? Is Jesus God? Am I a sinner, and if so, what is the remedy? What are the wages of sin? If you search with your heart, you will find the answer, for Jesus is real, alive, and a personal and loving God who forgives all of our sins and will never leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Matthew 28:20).

Principle 3: A personal relationship with Jesus Christ will transform your life. Wherever you are at on your spiritual journey, the closer you come to Jesus, the more clearly truth will be revealed in your life. Only Jesus can meet our needs to achieve perfect transcendence and purpose. Jesus will meet you wherever you find yourself on your present faith journey. Whether you are an atheist, an agnostic, a deist, a believer, or a born-again Christian, a genuine encounter with our Lord is the ultimate transformational experience. Many Christian beliefs appear to be foolish on an empirical level, but your doubt will be gradually or suddenly replaced with faith as you personally experience the power and peace of an intensely personal Savior. If you want this relationship, please say the following prayer with me:

Jesus, I confess my need for you. I am at a dead end when it comes to options. I know that I am imperfect person, that being a “good” person is not enough, and that I am a sinner. I am not even sure that you exist, but my heart knows that I cannot achieve peace or joy based upon my own efforts. Please come into my life, and show me that you are real. Please forgive me for my sins, and be the Lord of my life. Lord, grant unto me the faith to believe in spite of my intellectual and emotional doubts and confusion. Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief. Thank you for your mercy and grace, and for filling me with the hope of a transformed life. Lord, reveal yourself to me in a mighty way. Lord, please be my savior, teacher, counselor, and comforter and immerse me in your unconditional love.

It is an honor to serve the living God. To him be the glory, and may he complete the good work begun in you.

Application Questions

1. What are the key barriers to a more vital and vibrant relationship with Jesus in your life? How can they be overcome?
2. Do you believe that God takes a deep personal interest in your life? Why or why not?
3. How can you help others overcome obstacles to believing in God?

THE LORD'S VOICE

A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm (Matthew 8:24–26).

How do you hear the voice of Jesus as presented in Scripture? As leaders, our tone of voice and body language are more influential than the literal message in how our employees respond. However, when we are reading the written Word, those cues are not accessible and we project our own emotional color. If you are like me, the tone of voice and meaning behind the words Jesus expresses can change as the weather, based upon the vagaries of shifting personal spiritual and emotional states that influence the inner voice dialogues. Hence, my mental state can be a greater influence than the tone provided by the Holy Spirit. I often project myself in the place of the disciples as I face my own personal storms and demonstrate the same level of fear and panic. Just as body language and tone of voice greatly influence how others perceive and understand our message, our internal thoughts project their own form of inner space with a unique psychic body language and tone. How do you hear the voice of the Lord? Satan likes nothing better than for us to project a hostile, judgmental, legalistic, and condemning tone into our inner dialogues to instill discouragement, shame, and fear. In other words, Satan is the ultimate demanding boss. If that doesn't work, he shifts to a legalistic "this is not right" approach that tempts us to reject the message and rebel against the unfairness of the Lord's wisdom and discipline. To guard our hearts and minds against either of these "worldly sorrow" tactics, and to hear the voice of Jesus with a greater degree of clarity, we first need to understand the Lord's approach to discipline.

Hebrews 12 is the most succinct description of the Lord's formula for love. First, godly discipline is based upon pure love and concern for our wellbeing. Only God possesses both the ability and the desire to care about every area of our lives. God's love is unconditional, but the paradoxical balance of his amazing grace and holy judgment and

accountability defines his love. God's forgiveness is absolute, but there are enduring consequences. Second, God's discipline is always good for us and promotes our best interests, irrespective of our assessment of the situation. Discipline is never pleasant at the time of its dispensation, but it always produces the fruit of peace and joy. Recognize and be joyful that God's discipline embraces our deepest and most profound needs. We assess ourselves and others based upon appearance contaminated by the deception of our hearts, but God's pure assessment reaches into the inner depths of our being with perfect clarity and purity of motive. Just because the Lord has disciplined us, it does not diminish nor does it increase his eternal love. Let us rest in the knowledge that the Lord's voice is always a beacon of hope, guidance, and comfort, irrespective of our internal tone. Just like our parents and supervisors in the workplace, the Lord may raise his voice, but we are always the apple of his eye!

Application Questions

1. How would you describe the tone of voice of God when he speaks to you through the Bible or in prayer?
2. How can you help another Christian who struggles with a balanced view of God? What attributes of God would you most like to emphasize?
3. How can we hear God's inner voice more clearly?

CHAPTER 5



FAITH

ETERNAL JOB SECURITY

Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6).

One of the great scenes in all of Scripture is the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21. Pastor Mike Bickle in a powerful sermon (2014) presented a compelling interpretation of this encounter. To set the background, Peter was despondent and humiliated after he denied knowing Jesus three times, even though he had adamantly declared just a few hours earlier that he would be loyal to the end and die with Jesus. To that heartfelt but foolish demonstration of bravado, Jesus calmly and lovingly predicted Peter's denial, and demonstrated a foundational servant leader love-based principle: that life is not a sprint but a marathon of peaks and valleys. Jesus embraced the long-term developmental perspective. In Luke 21:31–34, Jesus informs Peter that the crucifixion is the crucible of a transformational life experience test. Satan's plan was to use Peter's denial as the powerful sifting device to destroy Peter's faith by using fear, shame, and regret, and thereby destroying his leadership confidence and credibility. Jesus responded with the love of a shepherd and stated that he was praying that Peter's faith would not fail and Peter would respond to the failure by learning from the situation and growing in servant leader character, humility, and faith. In essence, what Jesus stated was that Peter's leadership calling was irrevocable, and that he viewed those distressing events as tests that were necessary life experiences to prepare Peter for

effective service and leadership. Both Satan and God test us, but with different aims. Satan wants to “sift” us and generate an identity of failure that causes us to quit and embrace a suffocating pit of “worldly sorrow” or regret. This, in turn, leads to pity, anger, and a hopeless despondency of death and suicide, as exemplified by Judas. God’s tests bring to the surface the true motives of our heart, the nature of our character, and the true source of our strength. These painful but essential “trials by fire” surface the idols and self-serving icons of our understanding of God that need to be smashed. God provides us the freedom to choose which road to take. The devil is a gambler and recognizes that some will embrace worldly sorrow even when God provides the opportunity for all to select the path that leads to life. Returning to John 21, Peter had not embraced worldly sorrow, but was tempted to quit as evidenced by his decision to return to his occupation of fishing. Peter had fished all night without success, representing that once we are called, we cannot return to the previous life. As it states in Romans 11:29, our calling and gifts in Christ are irrevocable. They are eternal covenants, transcending our imperfections and sins. God called Peter to be a disciple and apostle, and so too with ourselves, nothing can separate us from God’s love in completing our purpose: not our failures, sins, weaknesses, pride, shame, or discouragement. When Jesus appeared on the shore and asked Peter to throw his net into the water, it reflected the principle that to be controlled by discouragement bears no good fruit, but when we continue forward as directed by the Lord, we will fill our nets with fish. One of the most encouraging and poignant scenes in Scripture is Peter resuming fellowship with Jesus and asking three times the existential question “Do you love me?” Jesus of course already knew the answer, but the questions were important on several levels. First, it was a loving and grace-based means for Peter to atone for his denial of Jesus. As he denied Jesus three times, Jesus himself demonstrated agape love and forgiveness by having Peter three times declare his love for Jesus. Second, it was an affirmation of Peter’s eternal job description to serve and lead the disciples and eventually be the foundation or “rock” of the church, a calling that cannot be undone by human weakness. Each time, Jesus responded to Peter by restating the servant leader job duties of tending and feeding the lambs and sheep. As Pastor Mike Bickle noted (2014), Jesus as a servant leader demonstrates his love and enjoyment for us in the midst of our greatest failures. The grace, encouragement, and forgiveness that we are given, we give to others.

This point that our calling and purpose as servant leaders is irrevocable was reinforced in a very personal fashion recently. I am a college professor who aspires to teach and lead as a servant leader, but I

arrived at this occupation by a very circuitous path. I possess wounds, insecurities, and areas of weakness, as all fallible humans do. Given a traumatic childhood and a family history of mental illness, I struggled with a variety of wounds, including mild obsessive-compulsive disorder and severe anxiety and panic disorder for many years. Just like Peter, we are not defined by our brokenness, but rest in the new birth of an eternal calling and purpose that cannot be derailed by our human frailties. Growing up, I wanted to be a meteorologist, but I did not possess the math skills. As noted in the previous section, as a freshman at Penn State, I took a career interest inventory, and much to my chagrin, my highest occupational matches were teaching and the ministry, a strange combination for an atheist. Given my kryptonite of calculus, I left meteorology and went through several majors before settling on Labor Studies, a liberal arts study area that resonated with my interests in social justice. While in the Labor Studies major, I started to experience severe panic attacks, which had many negative effects, including a reduction in my self-esteem and confidence in interpersonal situations. I enjoyed public speaking before the attacks, but afterward, my anxiety and self-consciousness in combination with my fear of appearing nervous in public made public speaking extremely intimidating. In my senior year, I took a course in public administration and enjoyed it, and decided that I wanted to work in government, given that it was a more secure and less demanding sector, or so I thought. I enjoyed the human resource management and labor relations area, and decided to attend graduate school, obtaining my Master of Public Administration with a concentration in human resources. As mentioned in a previous chapter, I graduated with a 4.0 average and obtained a good entry-level HR position with a major corporation, but was terminated for poor performance. This further eroded my confidence and led me to return home. I tried several other options, but given the anxiety and panic disorder, I did not have the resilience to persevere against the anxiety and had to quit each one, further eroding my confidence. It seemed that I painted myself into a corner. Where could I go? I returned to the comfort zone of school and decided to enroll in the PhD program at the University of Pittsburgh. I learned to cope with my public speaking fears by higher levels of preparation, which did help my performance, but not the obsessive worry and high levels of fear, as each speech was an ordeal. Here resides a major learning point: God is using even our weaknesses and fears to shape us and prepare us for our irrevocable calling. God used all the weapons formed to lead me to my calling in spite of, and because of, my strengths and weaknesses. At age twenty-four, before I entered the PhD program, I became a Christian as a result of my

dejection and desperation with the panic attacks, but I now thank God and recognize that he was present in my worst life nightmares and used these experiences to promote good. Over the years, I have had several instances in which my anxiety and fear resulted in very unpleasant public speaking experiences. My worst episode was seventeen years ago in a major presentation before the provost, when I lost my place and could not regain my composure. This was a very visible and public “failure” that has haunted all of my future presentations, given my fear of a repeat. The actual ramifications of the situation were minor and it was more embarrassing from the standpoint of pride. I was still tenured and asked to assume the leadership of the program. I have been blessed with great success in my teaching and speaking, but with the underlying anxiety of the fear of a repeat performance added to my risk aversion. However, as the years went by and I became closer to the Lord, I learned to be more confident of not making mistakes and became self-assured in the gifts that God had given me. To further enhance my public speaking skills, I enrolled in Toastmasters, which enabled me to gain additional poise. I became more comfortable as a speaker, recognizing that we are most effective when we do not try to imitate others, but are true to the unique personality, gifts, and abilities that God had given us. However, I recognized this fact at an intellectual level first and gradually began to allow myself to make mistakes as a speaker and move on, acknowledging that God does not call us to perfection of performance, but obedience and a good faith effort. I wrote in my journal of the need to allow myself to stumble or show nervousness in public speaking situations, and to respond by “getting up” and moving forward to complete the mission. However, I certainly did not want to “test” that theoretical understanding. However, unexpectedly, and much to my chagrin, at the beginning of a Saturday evening sermon I was giving at my local church, I unexpectedly and suddenly lost my place and for what seemed like an eternity, became the proverbial deer in the headlights. After seventeen years, one of my greatest fears returned. At that time, I wanted to walk off stage and hide, but I regained my composure and finished the sermon. I was tempted to act upon humiliation and shame, but the Lord’s voice of reassurance provided a calm and sense of peace in the center of my soul. I had two more services on Sunday morning. I was faced, like Peter was, with two choices: answer the call of worldly sorrow and give in to the fear, or trust God and practice what I was preaching to myself and others by getting up off the floor. I had a restless night, but the Lord spoke to me very clearly on the need to keep my eyes on him and trust in him for protection. I entered

the church that morning with peace, and both sermons were very successful and well received. As I prayed and reflected on the experience, I realized that God had provided multiple reinforcement that this event was part of his plan for my life. How can I really know if I have the courage to obey God and move forward when my “worst” fear occurs, unless I experience it and walk through the storm? God used this incident to reinforce that for all servant leaders, our calling is irrevocable and that the attacks formed will not prosper (Isaiah 54:17) as I serve him. Like Job, when our fear comes true, if we do not “curse God and die” as Job’s wife urged (Job 2:9), and with our “little strength” do not deny our calling (Revelation 3:8), God meets us and provides us with comfort and strength. As with Peter, Jesus will never “fire” us. God instructs us not to fear the looks (Ezekiel 3:9) or faces of others (Jeremiah 1:8 and Ezekiel 2:6), which is a way of helping us cope with the fear of man, as he did with Jeremiah and Ezekiel in their mission to prophesy the Lord’s unpopular words of judgment to the nation of Israel. Scripture also states that we should not fear the correction of men whether valid or invalid (Isaiah 51:7). God spoke to Isaiah and stated that we are not to fear the reproach or reviling of men, which is a form of negative feedback. To take it even further, Psalm 27:10 states that, “Even if my mother and father reject me, the Lord will take care of me.”

Even if we fail and are terminated justly by our employers, our mission and calling will go forward. Jesus will not fire us for our mistakes and sins. We have eternal job security. Hence, I am learning to walk with the faith that I can make mistakes, show weakness in my presentations, but remain faithful to my calling, which is guaranteed with an unshakable confidence, not in my abilities and efforts, but in the power and grace of God. You may not have the same areas of weakness, but the principle remains the same. As servant leaders, we all possess flaws but when surrendered to the Lord, they become a source of humility and strength as we learn that success is not defined by perfection, but rather by learning from our mistakes and falling forward. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. What areas of weakness cause you to worry or cause anxiety related to your performance?
2. How do you respond when you perform below your expectations?
3. What specific steps can you take to increase your trust in the Lord and persist with your calling in the face of adversity?

AGING WITH GRACE AND CONFIDENCE

And now, as you see, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel was journeying through the wilderness; and here I am today, eighty-five years old.¹¹ I am still as strong today as I was on the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war, and for going and coming (Joshua 14:10–11).

The aging process influences us all. As servant leaders, we understand at the core of our DNA that we must take on disciples and prepare the next generation. There are seasons of personal growth and development, and seasons in which we invest in others. At other times, we decrease so others can increase. However, God's calling and the gifts in our lives are irrevocable, and as long as you are in the organization, God will have mountains to climb and battles to fight. Our prayer should be to emulate Caleb and invest in self-care so we possess the mental, physical, and spiritual strength and stamina to meet new challenges. Joshua 14:10–11 is a comforting passage of hope as we age. As long as we are dedicated to serving the Lord in our position, God will provide the strength to fight the enemy. This is a comforting element as we grow old and have our youth renewed like the eagle's (Psalm 103:5)!

Application Questions

1. How are you approaching the aging process—with fear and dread, or confidence and hope?
2. What lifestyle changes are needed to help you age well?
3. What are your biggest obstacles to aging confidently, and how can they be overcome?

FEARING GOD MORE

With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me? (Psalm 118:6)

As servant leaders, we will face fear in many forms: from rational to irrational fear, functional to dysfunctional fear, and natural “fight or flight” fear to crippling demonic spiritual fear. We will need to continually confront these permutations of fear in ourselves and our employees with courage and understanding. It is important to comprehend the

biblical forms of fear. There are two types of fear. The first is the natural physiological fear response that God has instilled in our mind, body, and spirit to alert us and confront danger—the flight or fight response. The second is what Pastor Henry Wright (2008), in his excellent book on fear, defines as spiritual fear, or the type of irrational fear that paralyzes rational thought and action, thereby impeding our ability to realize our purpose and calling as Christians and servant leaders. By rational action, Pastor Wright refers firstly to a realistic assessment of dangers, and secondly, and most importantly, the ability to respond in godly faith to all of life's circumstances. Hence, there are situations in which a rational assessment of the danger may justify fear, but our faith in God's provision and protection overrides the evidence of the senses and the logic of the circumstances.

Another key principle is defining the difference between temptation and sin in relation to fear. The physiological and emotional experience of fear is not a sin, irrespective of its roots, rational or irrational. Jesus was tempted in all ways as we were, yet without sin. This entails the experience of fear as he sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:24). However, Jesus, given his sinless nature, never permitted fear to influence or control his thinking, decision making, and action. Hence, experiencing fear is a ubiquitous aspect of our human nature. The experience of fear only becomes a sin when it controls any one or more of these attributes: thinking, decision making, and/or behavior. The definition of control is the state when the power and influence of the object of the fear exerts greater authority than the promises or command of God to "fear not." In essence, fear becomes spiritual fear and sin when the fear is greater than our faith. We all are influenced by and succumb to fear in some fashion. The key is to learn to recognize the presence and influence of spiritual fear, confess it as a sin, and ask God for forgiveness. The wonderful news is that God understands the power and effects of fear, and has provided many examples in Scripture that provide guidance and encouragement. His grace, love, and patience overwhelm all spiritual fear. One of the greatest examples in Scripture is Peter and the disciples fleeing and abandoning Jesus at his arrest and crucifixion (Mark 14). They acted out of fear, but Jesus, as the ultimate servant leader, forgave and used the experiences as transformational teaching moments.

A key point that we must all recognize is the definition of courage. Courage is not the absence of fear, but moving forward and believing in God for his protection in its presence. Overcoming fear requires time and patience. It is not a perfect linear process, but a general upward progression as we confront our fears with God's word and his Holy

Spirit in faith. As Pastor Wright (2008) notes, we take varying steps forward and backward, but over time we move forward and gain victory. God has provided hundreds of “fear busting” examples in Scripture to encourage us in all types of conflict (see Psalm 56:3, Isaiah 41:10, Romans 8:15, 2 Timothy 1:7, Matthew 14:27, for a few examples).

I would like to end with a personal example in which we obey and honor God when we embrace godly fear over spiritual fear. When I was asked by our university president to assume the role of interim dean, I was gripped by great natural and spiritual fear. The school was going through a very tumultuous period of heated policy-related conflict with the central administration, resulting in the removal of the respected and well-regarded prior dean. Three faculty members also left for various reasons, and the school was in disarray. To complicate matters, the prior dean would remain on the faculty, increasing the stress for unfavorable comparisons between the new and previous leadership. In addition to these rational fears, I had my own spiritual fear strongholds related to the fear of man, confrontations, public speaking fears, especially with the new role requirements, and a general fear of the performance demands. I prayed about this, and turned down the offer and urged that another faculty member be considered. Negotiations with that faculty member failed to reach an agreement, and they came back to me.

This time, after much prayer and reflection, I began to discern the encouragement of the Lord to accept the position. In my prayer times, I began to discern that this was the Lord’s will and part of his purpose and calling for my life as a servant leader. This would be a great opportunity to serve the school and grow in faith. I began to reflect on God’s promises for provision, protection, and equipping (Genesis 28:15, Matthew 28:20) as I moved forward. I became convinced that this was God’s will and I began to understand that my fear of God was greater than my fear of the circumstances. I was still afraid, but I feared (respected) God’s promises more—that no weapons formed against me will succeed (Isiah 54:17), and that the Lord has equipped me with his love, power, and a sound mind to overcome every obstacle (2 Timothy 1:7). Hence I feared God by believing his promises and exercising faith! I accepted the position of interim dean with “fear and trembling,” and the following two years of service were some of the most challenging, but rewarding and growth-inducing, periods of my life. I did not win every battle with fear, but God was with me through every encounter and great fruit was produced both in my personal and professional growth as a servant leader, and most importantly, in achieving the mission of stabilizing the school and

developing new programs that were foundational to the school's future, thereby preparing a solid foundation for the permanent dean. The Lord asked me if I had the courage to walk in the dark places of fear with him, trusting him to be a shield. Would I be willing to temporarily increase my stress and discomfort level for the good of others? I thank the Lord that he granted me the courage to say yes, and that is my prayer; that when your time comes, you will walk with the Lord with shaking knees to fulfill his purpose for your life.

Application Questions

1. What areas of your life are controlled or influenced by fear? What are the consequences of this control?
2. How can you increase your self-trust and confidence to face your fears?
3. How can you help your subordinates or others to face their fears?

BELIEF AND FAITH

As Christian servant leaders, the strength of our faith will determine key elements of our success. Christian belief and faith are the fundamental “action” principles for entry into the Kingdom. Without belief and faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is the higher order construct as belief is a necessary though insufficient condition for salvation. The demons believe in God (James 2:19), but made a free-will choice to reject his dominion. Given their fundamental importance, what are the true biblical standards for belief and faith? Is it a one hundred percent certainty of mind and a one hundred percent consistency of emotion? We are frequently in a state of condemnation, as our own conscience and the devil accuse us of hypocrisy, given the gap between our present faith level and God's assumed required standards. Let us address the biblical foundations of faith, which consist of two key components:

1. Belief, which is a heart-based agreement regarding the key attributes of God including:
 - a. God's existence
 - b. God's creation of and dominion over the universe (omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent)
 - c. God's nature and attributes including his goodwill toward humanity (love, grace, and forgiveness) and his redemption of humanity from death and sin through Christ's death and resurrection.
 - d. God's promotion of our growth, development, and best interests

2. Our free-will choice to trust God as evidenced by:
 - a. Actions (thoughts, attitude, and behaviors) that are motivated by a heart-based confidence and trust in God's attributes
 - b. An understanding that our faith is not conditioned upon receiving the object of our faith. Faith is a form of trust in a relationship that emphasizes a state of being in communion with God and His presence. As Pastor Henry Wright (2008) notes, faith and fear are both equal and demand fulfillment. Not every object of our faith occurs, nor everything that we fear.

Faith, like love, is not mere intellectual assent; it is the exercise of free-will agreement in spite of our feelings, thoughts, and the evidence of the senses. Belief and faith are a direct result of what is in our hearts. For example, in Romans 10:9–10, Paul states “because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.” Notice that Scripture does not say we believe based upon the power of logic or rationality, or on the power of raw emotion, but based on what is in our hearts—the quiet, intrinsic expression of our deepest longing for unity with God. Our thoughts and emotions are highly variable and unreliable, but the heart reflects the essential attributes, motives, and character of our spirit.

A great example of this is the demon-possessed boy in Mark 9:17–25. The boy's father asked Jesus' disciples to cast out the demon, and their inability only enhanced the father's confusion and doubts about God. However, the father was desperate, so he cried out to Jesus to heal his son in spite of his intellectual and emotional doubts (“Please help us if you can!”). The key factor was the father exercising his will to believe and to trust, thereby activating the power of God to answer this dire request. In other words, he cried out with his heart to Jesus. What did Jesus do? Did he reject him for a lack of one hundred percent complete faith? No, he was compassionate and healed the son. So here is the lesson: no matter what you feel or think, if you call out to the Lord, he will save you. Another great doubter in the Bible, Thomas, possessed great qualms about Christ's resurrection, thereby challenging the fundamental truth claim of Christianity. Thomas' questions were rooted in the angst of a heart-based search for the truth. There are two kinds of doubt: a stubborn doubt born of rebellion and pride that refuses to acknowledge God and an honest doubt based upon the desire to discover the truth and find God. One way of answering the “spirit” behind your doubts relates to the source

and nature of the fear and insecurity. The root of Thomas' fear was that Jesus was not the Messiah in spite of his earnest and passionate hope, thereby making his faith vain and foolish. In contrast, the Pharisees feared that Jesus was the truth, the way and the life, thereby threatening their power and authority, for they loved the praise of men more than the affirmation of God (John 12:43). One other means for assessing whether your doubt is honest or stubborn relates to the locus of our fear regarding the existence of God. For the honest doubter, the great fear is that God is not real; for the stubborn doubter, it is that God exists and that he or she will be held accountable. Let us all commit to casting our doubts on God and trusting him, for all those who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13)!

Application Questions

1. What aspects of the Bible are most difficult for you to accept or believe? What strategies can you adopt to increase your faith and understanding?
2. We all have doubts. How would you characterize your own doubt? Is it stubborn or honest doubt?
3. How comfortable are you with discussing faith issues with others? What steps can increase your comfort and confidence level?

THE STAGES OF FAITH

Christian service leadership is a paradoxical combination of complexity and simplicity. We see this dynamic tension reflected in the foundational pillar of faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is a combination of God-given attributes and the exercise of our free will. The basis of faith is God's internal spirit planted in our hearts, generating a yearning for transcendence and redemption. Foundational faith bears fruit when we make the decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, and his protection covers all of our actions, past, present, and future. It is never too late to accept his offer of salvation. God intervened in my life on many occasions before I accepted him and developed a conscious faith. God protects us against unimaginable problems and attacks every second of our lives. He loved and died for us while we were sinners (Romans 5:6). A great and comforting spiritual truth is that God uses all of our experiences, good and bad, our decisions, wise or foolish, and our actions, righteous or sinful, to forge and perfect faith and character. Romans 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are

called according to his purpose.” Our merciful God (Genesis 50:20) transforms that which is evil in our lives into a blessing.

Once we achieve salvation, our ability to grow in faith is influenced by our truth-seeking and application strategies. These three factors are:

1. *Knowledge*: Do we understand the spiritual principles as presented in the Bible and the collective wisdom of the historical and contemporary Church?
2. *Belief*: Do we accept the truth, application, and power of Christian biblical and spiritual principles?
3. *Practice*: Do we apply (be a hearer and doer) of scriptural principles to our lives?

Where does reason enter the picture? Reason is an attribute of God, and our creation in God’s image endows us with this ability to test and question. There are two forms of intellectual seeking: an honest approach that pursues truth wherever it leads (ideally to Jesus, the source of truth) and a closed (stubborn) approach that seeks to confirm a pre-existing position.

A stubborn approach inhibits the ability to discover the truth, while an open approach uses the inevitable doubts that we possess to seek answers directly from the source of wisdom, Jesus Christ. The apostle Thomas was an honest searcher who was seeking the truth, wherever it led to, while the Pharisees engaged in a stubborn or closed information search.

Table 5.1 lists a summary of the various stages of faith development.

Where are you in the stages of faith development? The good news is that we serve a God who will meet us where we are, whether on the mountaintop, in the valley of sorrow, or in the pit of despair, if we will but humble ourselves and call out to him. God is in the faith development business, and is committed to helping all those who seek him in truth. Rejoice, for wherever one finds oneself on this scale, God is committed to moving the mountains of doubt in your life when you throw yourself at the foot of the Cross and deny the idols of self-righteousness and pride. He is truly an equal opportunity restorer!

Application Questions

1. Assess your level of maturity on the knowledge, belief, and practice scales. Where are your strengths and weaknesses?
2. Discuss strategies for increasing your own faith and that of others.
3. Where are you in regards to the stages of spiritual development? What are your main obstacles to growth?

Table 5.1 Stages of Faith Development

Spiritual State	Characteristics	Scripture Passage	Outcome
Stubborn Doubt: Atheism	Rejection of all spiritual explanations and belief in God.	Psalms 53:1, "Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'"	Resistance to all forms of spirituality and religion, a stubborn hard-heartedness that promotes existential confusion.
Honest Doubt: Agnostic	An uncertainty regarding the existence of God based upon the inability to prove the existence of God through empirical or logical reasoning.	Mark 9:24, "Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'"	Receptivity to some forms of empirically verified religious or spiritual experience, but a restricted information search, given the inability to accept the reality of religious experiences based on faith. Promotes existential confusion as well.
Belief	An acceptance of a higher being.	James 2:19, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder."	Even the devils believe in God. Belief is not enough. One can believe in a higher power, but fail to embrace the foundational tenets.
Salvation	Confession of faith in Jesus Christ.	1 Corinthians 3:1, 3 "And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. For you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?"	The embrace of the fundamental tenets of Christianity is the beginning stage of transformation, engendering an awareness of our weakness and need for God. Many Christians do not progress beyond this stage and maintain the past sinful lifestyle, thereby perpetuating physical, psychological, and spiritual problems.
Maturity	An active profession of faith in which the believer's life centers on devotion to God producing in integration of knowledge, belief and practice (sanctification process)	Galatians 5:22–23, "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."	The sanctification process produces a holistic integration that transforms the believer's life in all areas. This results in a change in values, needs, and priorities that result in physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellbeing.

THE GROWTH OF FAITH

As Christian servant leaders, faith is the foundation of victorious character. We commit a serious error when we take it upon ourselves to manufacture artificially the faith needed to live as a God-honoring servant leader. We cannot generate faith on our own efforts. Christian servant leader character requires a lifetime of seasons to perfect. This stands in stark contradiction to our society that believes in immediate gratification. This produces a whole host of pathologies, including the inability to cultivate patient and long-term growth and change. We never achieve complete Christ-like character in our brief frame of existence on earth. It requires a lifetime of clearing fields of the rocks and weeds (sin), plowing the fallow ground (obedience), planting and watering, tending, pruning, and finally reaping a harvest. Each “crop” possesses a different growth cycle.

A great example of this principle lies in the lives of the disciples. Before Pentecost, the disciples lived with Jesus, personally experienced his miracles, and exercised the power to cast out demons and heal the sick. They were confident that when tested, they would not fail Jesus. However, the weak nature and superficial depth of their faith and character commitment was in full display as they fled with the arrest of Jesus and Peter’s subsequent denial. The failure was crushing and absolute in terms of the disciple’s human strength, but in God’s eyes, it was a pivotal spiritual lesson that was part of God’s divine grace-based plan for making spirit-filled disciples.

Spiritual growth is a long-term process requiring patience and learning from failure and repentance from sin. When Jesus appeared to them after the resurrection (John 20:19), his first words were “Peace be with you,” a powerful demonstration of love, forgiveness, and hope. God’s presence revitalized them, and they waited patiently and prepared themselves by intense prayer for the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. After Pentecost, they were changed men and women who transformed the world. Our role is to seek, trust, and obey God, and God will supply us with the faith we need. Our task is to act on our will to believe. As the great nineteenth century English minister Smith Wigglesworth stated, “Do not focus on what you feel, or what you think, but on what you believe.” Your feelings and thoughts are only partially rational, and Satan and our fleshly desires easily manipulate our decisions and actions. When we focus on our beliefs, we stand on faith, and God will act and change our circumstances or provide the necessary strength to endure as servant leaders.

Application Questions

1. How patient are you with yourself in the character development process?
2. What areas provide the greatest character development challenges in your life?
3. What are your biggest obstacles to a more dynamic faith?

FAITH, TRUST, AND THE HEART

Over time, as we surrender and die to the self as servant leaders, God gradually transforms our thoughts and feelings to conform to his perfect will for our lives. What we believe and trust reflects the condition of our heart and the spirit ruling our life. Scripture states, “Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).” Notice that this Scripture does not say that belief relies on logic or rationality or on raw emotion. Belief reflects what resides in our hearts, the quiet, intrinsic expression of our deepest longing for unity with God. A great example of this is the demon-possessed boy in Mark 9:17–25 as noted previously. The father asked Jesus’ disciples to cast out the demon, and they could not. This failure was the product of the disciples’ self-reliance on their own efforts versus the need to rely on God’s power as activated by prayer. The disciples’ failure eroded further the confidence and faith of the father in the power of God. The failings of other Christians can weaken our faith. I know that this was my own personal walk where I mistakenly imputed the mistakes, weaknesses, and limits of Christians to God. However, the father in this biblical passage was desperate, so he cried out to Jesus to heal his son in spite of his intellectual and emotional doubts (“Please help us if you can!”). In other words, he cried out with his heart to Jesus. What did Jesus do? Did he reject him for a lack of faith? No, he had compassion and healed the son. So here is the lesson: no matter what you feel or think, call out to the Lord, and he will save you.

Two other Scripture passages reinforce this point. In Matthew 8:23–27 Jesus and his disciples found themselves in the midst of a terrible storm. The disciples tried to ride out the storm by their own power, but fear overwhelmed their resolve. Jesus was asleep below, secure in his faith in God and the Holy Spirit, an example of what we should aspire to. Jesus awoke to their cries for help, and calmed the storm. Jesus knew by faith that he would “get to the other side” to complete his mission. The second instance was when Jesus, and then

Peter, walked on water (Matthew 14:22–33). As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to walk on water as well. Peter started in faith, but when his focus shifted from Jesus to gazing upon the wind and waves, representing the storms and problems of life, he began to sink. However, even if we lose our faith focus, Jesus in his grace and mercy always responds to heartfelt cries for help. When Peter called out to Jesus to save him, Jesus reached out his hand and pulled him up. Jesus will extend his hand and pull us out of all of our storms, if we possess the humility, heart, and belief in the saving power of Jesus. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. In what area of your life do you need to “walk on water” in order to overcome obstacles?
2. How do the “storms” of your life influence your faith?
3. What steps or actions are needed to help you trust the Lord more in the storm?

KEEPING OUR EYES ON JESUS

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased (Matthew 14:22–32, *KJV*).

Pure faith that moves mountains is a precious gift of the Holy Spirit, and is infrequently experienced or seen in this fallen world, even among Christians. God in his grace and mercy understands our weaknesses and limitations in this regard, and Scripture comforts and also exhorts the “faith-challenged” to higher states of trust, thereby turning “weakness

into strength,” as in Hebrews 11:34, and strengthening the “hanging hands” and “feeble knees,” as in Hebrews 12:12.

From a Christian servant leader perspective, it is important to understand that even our “faith” is a gift of God. Scripture illustrates this clearly in Hebrews 12:2, which states that God is the source and finisher of our faith. Ecclesiastes 3:11 proclaims that God implants eternity in every human heart, which is the gentle voice that witnesses that our quest for meaning, purpose, and security requires a power (God) beyond ourselves, and that the temporal tools of this world such as wealth, power, pleasure, science, technology, and reason are fleeting. As such, every human heart is endowed with the requisite level of faith to achieve salvation, but its use is a free-will volitional act that requires knowledge (hence the importance of preaching the Word) and a genuine recognition of our need for a savior. The foundational degree of faith required for salvation is only a starting point in the Christian journey of sanctification. To run the race of life and grow in Christ-likeness, we must recognize that it is not the amount of faith, but the cultivation of the degree of faith God has graciously granted that pleases him. We sow and reap, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6)!

God radically reinforced this point with the trials and tribulations associated with my wife Connie’s bout with breast cancer. As Scripture demonstrates, intellectual faith and assent collapse like a house of cards under the fiery trials of life. After Connie’s diagnosis with cancer, I recognized that I would have to keep my eyes on Jesus like Peter walking on the water to cope with the storms to come. I possessed intellectual understanding, but there are several questions to address before stepping on the tempestuous water. Could I maintain focus for a sustained length of time? What would it require on a daily basis to keep one’s eyes on Jesus? For a prolonged storm, the truth is that most of us will “sink” at one time or another, given that the powerful ongoing temptations weaken our resolve. The good news is that the peace always returns when we return to the Cross and humble ourselves and cry out to Jesus as Peter did. There is no shame or condemnation in admitting that we temporarily lost sight of the Lord. The very act of crying out to him demonstrates that our faith is strong enough to weather the storm, reinforcing Paul’s admonitions in Romans 10:13 that “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,” and in 2 Corinthians 12:9 in which God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness.

What factors cause us to sink? The first is the constant temptation to “fortune-tell” and ruminate on the plethora of harmful possibilities that Satan implants and our own active imagination copiously produces. Satan is actively seeking to destroy our will and courage to endure the

challenges and trials of life, thereby stealing our identity and purpose in God. To rebut these lies, remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:34, that the Lord only provides the strength to face the storms of the moment and by being anxious, we cannot solve future problems or add any time to our lives by worrying (Matthew 6:27). Second, recognize and embrace that God protects his servants. Remember Isaiah 54:17 and the assurance that no weapon formed against us will prosper. We will continue to serve until the Lord, and only the Lord, calls us home and our ministry time is complete on this earth (Philippians 1:6). Satan possesses no power over us except that granted by the Lord to complete our calling and promote our best interests (John 19:11).

Another cause of sinking is our pride as Christians. We know all the Scripture, but we fail to embrace it in a heartfelt, humble fashion. This reflects the legalistic, works-based mentality that we must vigilantly combat. In the midst of my wife's cancer treatments, I tried to "carry on" and meet all of my normal work obligations, given my fear of not performing according to my customary standards and thereby displeasing others. When we embrace the "stiff upper lip" and try to maintain our normal work and social schedule by simply working harder, the result is burnout and a repression of our fears and other negative emotions until they boil over in the form of anxiety, anger, and depression that eventually results in a slow or quick "meltdown" or "shutdown."

However, in God's economy even our dips beneath the waves are beneficial, because they force us to truly humble ourselves and address the root cause of our fears. Negative emotions are early warning systems if we attune ourselves to the source of the transmissions. As I returned to the Cross, God began to reveal the presence and power of several strongholds. In God's economy, nothing is wasted, even our pain, suffering, and sins, if we love God and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28). God will use the crucible of fiery trials to reveal imperfections and remove the dross, preparing our hearts for greater levels of servant leader service. So never despair or hesitate to call out to the Lord when you are sinking in the storms of life. The peace will return as Jesus stilled the waves, and we will learn great truths to equip us for greater Kingdom service.

Application Questions

1. What life circumstances or problems have caused you to "sink beneath the waves" in the past? What did you learn from the experience?
2. What are the factors that make it difficult to "keep your eyes on the Lord" in the midst of the storm?
3. How can you help others that "fall beneath the waves"?

CHAPTER 6



SPIRITUAL VIRTUES

REFLECTIONS ON HUMILITY: TEMPTING OTHERS TO SIN

Jesus said to his disciples, “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble” (Luke 17:1–2).

One of the great temptations in leadership is the desire to be worshipped. Not, of course, in a formal religious fashion, but on a practical level. The power associated with leadership roles is a great temptation to our pride, ego, and insecurities. Servant leaders are to be respected, but not feared or made into idols. Perfection as a leader is, of course, impossible, but our hearts strive for this goal anyway given a variety of motives, from pride to the underlying fear of failure at the heart of perfectionism. Perfectionists define their identity and worth relative to their performance—an enslaving mindset. Perfectionism is a cruel taskmaster. The perfectionist has no peace in his heart as he is serving a cruel idol. If the root of perfectionism is insecurity, every sign of weakness must be repressed vigorously. The primal fear that never leaves is the perpetual gnawing of the conscience of perfectionists that they are living a lie. The conscience whispers accusing, tormenting, and condemning thoughts, relative to their true state of weakness, insecurity, and the frauds that they are. For the narcissist, the inner voice praises one’s great ability and the relative weakness and unworthiness of others. However, as we all know, no

matter how effective or competent we are as leaders, we are imperfect, make mistakes, and possess weaknesses; hence, we are flawed. If you as a leader are able to promote the façade of perfection, it produces a toxic brew of temptations for your subordinates and others that serve with you.

History is replete with examples of failed leaders that promoted their invincibility, leaving a trail of destruction, misery, and death from Egyptian pharaohs, Roman, Inca, and Aztec emperors, European kings, modern tyrants such as Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot, and cult leaders like Jim Jones. The façade of perfection first generates in their followers a form of idol worship that suspends reason, moral judgment, and our humanity. When the inevitable failures occur, it creates resentment, disillusionment, and disengagement, “shipwrecking our faith.” For others, the façade of perfectionism leads to jealousy, envy, rebellion, and a desire to challenge the power of the king. The same is true at the level of the workplace. When the illusion of perfectionism rules, employees are reluctant to provide open and honest feedback, as they fear revealing weakness, poor performance, or “bad news” in general. In essence, the lie of being perfect tempts our employees to sin in a variety of ways.

One of the clear elements of spiritual intelligence is to ask the Holy Spirit for discernment on how our attitudes, personality, and actions are perceived by others. We must review our body language, tone of voice, and the content of our communication on success and failure. Are we being perceived as arrogant, boastful, prideful, externalizing our accountability or rationalizing our role? This can be accessed through 360-degree appraisals, for example. However, even if we are humble and communicate success or failure in the appropriate fashion, we cannot control the reactions of others. Some will be jealous, angry, or resentful. In this case, we need to pray continually that this negative energy is not used in a destructive fashion, either creating conflict or disunity or through the negative internal effects of anger and jealousy.

What is the clear antidote? The solution is ongoing humility. Servant leaders desire respect and dignity, not worship or fear. Humility is the ongoing communication that success is a collective team effort, an acknowledgement that the leader is human and vulnerable, and that long-term success entails organization-wide empowerment and engagement. Servant leaders who desire to “break the spell” communicate their vulnerabilities, areas of weakness, and take responsibility by communicating their mistakes and failures. This is, of course, done in a responsible and reasoned fashion. The leader sets

the example when he or she models that learning and success entail mistakes, errors, and failures as we debrief and conduct the post-mortem sessions in a confident, loving, and nonjudgmental fashion. They also accept that not all will respond in a positive and reasonable fashion, but they will do everything possible to reduce temptations to employees to act on negative impulses. This is a very challenging path, but the Lord provides us with the strength and courage when we surrender to him.

Applications Questions

1. In what area of your leadership do you desire to be worshipped? How does this desire manifest itself?
2. How can you promote a more transparent and humble working environment?
3. What steps can you take to reduce jealousy and fear in the workplace?

ARE YOU A CHEERFUL RECEIVER?

In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

One of the great contributors to our growth as Christian servant leaders is seeking the full meaning of a Scripture passage using hermeneutical or exegetical analysis. However, in addition to the explicit interpretation of the passage, there is often an extrapolated message from the core text. For example, it may be better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35), but I firmly believe that in addition to being a cheerful giver, we must in turn be a cheerful receiver. First, let us distinguish the concept from other constructs. In most organizational contexts, the prevailing rules of social exchange are varying combinations of social reciprocity, transactions, and gift giving. In transactional situations, we exchange resources to promote mutually beneficial ends or goals. In other words, a supervisor is granted a promotion for excellent job performance. Another common approach is the law of reciprocity, in which a giver provides something of value to promote within the receiver a sense of obligation to “return the favor.” Another approach is altruistic gift giving, when the giver expects nothing in return: a very biblical concept.

However, all the approaches do not address the reaction and response of the receiver from a Christian worldview. How can we become a cheerful receiver? The first element is to acknowledge—intellectually and in practice—that all things, favorable, unfavorable, neutral, all of our abilities, gifts, opportunities, our successes and failures, come from or are permitted by the Lord. This is extremely important as a presupposition that there are no independent and self-made men or women. We are all debtors to the God of the universe that holds back a million issues every day that could destroy us. The second presupposition flows from the first, as we are all imbedded within a larger system, a body of Christ—a system of interconnected parts, each dependent on the other. The third presupposition is that we are all debtors first to God, and then to others. In other words, we are all the beneficiaries of gifts that none of us can repay. How can you recompense God for the creation of the universe? How can you reimburse God for giving you life? How can you repay God for the death of Jesus on the Cross and forgiving your sins for all eternity? How can you repay the mother who gave you birth, or the sons and daughters of colonial America who fought and died for our independence? How can we repay our military families for the loss of their sons and daughters to preserve our freedom? The answer is that we are all debtors to greater systems of accounting. However, neither God nor our society expects individuals to fully repay the cost of our freedom, only to honor their memory by faithfully fulfilling our calling and purpose in the various life domains and spheres we influence, including the workplace.

Here resides the main point. The giver and receiver are part of a chain of events that promotes the greater good. To be a cheerful giver means we give freely and joyfully from our heart as directed by the Lord. Hence, we are giving from the correct motives, using moral means, to promote God-honoring ends. The role of the receiver is to accept the object joyfully, without guilt, pride, or an exaggerated sense of obligation to “return the favor.” The reason that the law of reciprocity is used so effectively relates to the underlying pride element, and our discomfort in feeling indebted to others. When we recognize that we owe more than we can ever repay from a cosmic sense, we are more at rest and willing to allow others to give to us unconditionally. This also facilitates the altruistic growth of others. When we are in need, if we refuse to allow others to give as directed by the Lord, we impede the giver’s character growth through the act of giving and our growth in humility from the receiving end. In essence, our pride hinders the body of Christ.

This principle is vital to promote in the workplace as well. Effective workplaces embrace servant leader and follower principles. This entails encouraging altruistic support and recognizing that it is a privilege to permit fellow employees to come to your assistance, enhancing their personal growth and organizational effectiveness. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your maturity level in terms of being a cheerful giver? A cheerful receiver?
2. What specific area of growth in giving and receiving do you need to address and why? How can you grow in the area of giving and receiving?
3. How will growth in your ability to receive “cheerfully” affect your relationships in the workplace?

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also (1 John 4:19–21).

Do you possess an inborn need to receive love? Most of us would answer that rather basic question with a resounding “yes.” However, as with many issues in the Kingdom of God, the conventional answers fail to receive endorsement by careful review of Scripture. An excellent book on the subject is *When People Are Big and God is Small*, by Edward T. Welch (1997). The thesis of the book is that when we need people more than we love them, it creates the idolatry of codependency and the fear of man. Modern psychology and many Christian psychologists embrace the “loving cup” view of human nature that states, “wounded and broken” we become if God and others fail to fill our vessels with love, support, and encouragement. Is this image correct?

Welch makes a convincing argument otherwise. First, we must grasp the concept of our creation in God’s image. God loves purely and perfectly, not because of his need to fulfill an unmet desire, but because “God is love” and love is his foundational and immutable attribute. God first loved us unconditionally because that is his nature (Seamands, 2004). The trinity embodies this wonderful but mysterious principle.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in a perfect “love triangle.” They give and receive love in a completely self-sustaining and fulfilling relationship. Each member of the Trinity grants unconditional love to the other, and in turn, receives unconditional love. This reflects the other great mystery of the universe, as God is the “uncaused cause,” setting in motion all other forms of existence and being. As human beings created in the image of God, Adam was given Eve so he could be an image bearer of God and love Eve unreservedly, just as Adam was originally created by God for love and fellowship.

When Adam and Eve sinned, the foundational relationship element of unconditional love was corrupted and reduced to the self-serving and idolatrous love, which ultimately enslaves. We can never achieve Christ-likeness by employing the humanistic psychology approach of placing our needs at the center. God calls us to imitate him by loving others first, without conditions. As created beings, we cannot manifest the perfect self-contained love manifested in the Trinity, but the Body of Christ, the Church, is the God-given means to develop our ability to grant and receive love. We cannot practice unconditional love without Christ as Lord and the body of Christ to teach and model these behaviors. Our sin nature continually redirects our attention to meeting self-needs and desires through the many forms of counterfeit love. This is why the family is “ground zero” in terms of spiritual warfare. If our parents and families fail to model and practice Christ-like unconditional love, Satan instills spiritual, physical, and emotional wounds that lead us to medicate our pain with love counterfeits, further accentuating the power of sin over our lives. We become needy, fearful, and develop a warped sense of self-esteem.

However, the solution the world offers is to convince us that the problem is not our sinfulness, but the fact that others are not meeting our needs or we are the victims of circumstances and outside forces. What is the solution? The first step is to admit our brokenness and our own inability and that of others to cure what ails us. We must take responsibility for the sin, forgive those who hurt us, and ask for forgiveness for our sin as well as the dysfunctional means that we use to cover our pain and shame. God will meet our legitimate needs (not all our desires), and he will give us the love and security so we can love him and others without condition. This is clearly an ongoing, long-term process, imperfectly completed in this life, but the more “we learn to need others less and love them more,” as Welch states, the more we grow in freedom.

These lessons are important for the workplace as well. Just like Jesus, our calling is to work with excellence, serve others, and love

them unconditionally. Even if others treat us unfairly, our self-esteem and identity do not depend upon the attitudes, actions, and support of others. They can no longer manipulate our reactions. We are hurt, but the arrows and stones do not break us. We receive deep comfort from Christ for the wounds and are able to move forward. As servant leaders, we love and encourage others and hold them accountable. We hope that others will model the Golden Rule and return the love, accountability, and encouragement. When this occurs, the workplace is blessed. When others fail us, we reject anger and bitterness, pray for our brothers and sisters, practice forgiveness, and move forward. We then achieve an amazing level of freedom and love as we exhibit the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To God be the Glory!

Application Questions

1. How would you describe your personal understanding and practice of love? Do you agree or disagree with Welch's approach and why?
2. What steps do you need to take to improve your understanding, experience, and practice of love closer to a biblical understanding?
3. What are the greatest obstacles to practicing unconditional love, and how can they be overcome?

AMAZING GRACE

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8–9).

One of the most difficult servant leader lessons in life is to learn how to fail with grace. Only when we grasp our complete dependence on God's unearned favor and love can we begin to cease from the endless toil and labor of prideful self-effort and a spirit of works that leaves us vulnerable to the continual tossing of the waves. It was at one of those dark, fearful, and lonely periods of my life that I began to grasp the reality of God's grace. The old demonic giants of fear returned, standing in the middle of the road I was traveling. Like Dante's chilling description of his descent into hell in the classic work *The Divine Comedy*, the giants blocked the road ahead with no means for overcoming the obstacles.

It was at the moment of shame, darkness, and defeat that the Lord gently spoke words that changed my life. The Lord told me to stop

running away from him, stop fighting on my own strength, stop rebelling, and surrender to his unconditional love and grace. If I was in a coma, completely bedridden, God would still love me; if I were in a mental hospital, paralyzed with fear and deception, God still loves me. I cannot run from or fight against this great cosmic spiritual truth. The power of unconditional love is a gift and Jesus alone produces “victory” in all forms.

The Lord brought to mind in a loving and gentle fashion the parable of the Prodigal Son. We are all prodigals in our unique ways, and I am the pride-based, legalistic, perfectionistic, works-driven, rationalizer, and intellectual prodigal son. My entire ministry works count for naught if done to earn God’s love and approval. When driven by fleshly motives and a flawed understanding of God’s attributes and heart, God cannot reward and reinforce the narcissism that retains such pain and contradicts his character. It is better to jettison our self-driven striving for success, clearly see the corruption of our underlying motives, and grasp that we enter this world with nothing but our precious spirits, and enter eternity with only our spirits and the love we deposited through obedience and godly works. When we begin to understand that God’s love and his presence are enough, we commence serving others out of love. Whether we run away, fight, or rebel for a moment or for many years, do we believe that God is sufficient? When the answer is “yes,” the angels rejoice!

Application Questions

1. What is your personal definition of God’s grace? Is it the same as the biblical definition? Why or why not?
2. Have you personally experienced God’s grace? How has it changed your life?
3. What are the greatest challenges to experiencing God’s grace? How can they be overcome?

THE POWERFUL WEAPON OF GRACE

So that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21).

Have you ever felt under condemnation because you believed you lacked the courage or strength to face a leadership trial? Are you ever

concerned that you will fail and let God “down”? I frequently experience misguided shame through fearing that I will not “measure up” at the time of crisis. In most instances, this catastrophic “what-if” thinking is a lie from the pit of hell designed to discourage us from following God’s will. I was recently lost in the wilderness of self-defeat when the Lord revealed a powerful manifestation of grace, a pre-emptive “lightning strike” against the attacks of the enemy through Scripture. The life and ministry of Jesus demonstrated that in spite of his omniscient knowledge of the disciples’ failures and sins, their serious lapses and deficiencies in judgment, character, and courage, Jesus always loved and forgave, disciplined, encouraged, showered grace, and said “peace be unto you”! The amazing fact is that God knows our actions, feelings, emotions, thoughts, desires, sins, temptations, and failures before we feel and act on them. David Seamands (1999), in his book *Healing Grace*, states that because God is pure love, our failings do not influence or change his love toward us. God loves unconditionally, and the ministry of Jesus consistently demonstrates unconditional love, patience, and loving discipline toward the disciples, who doubted, denied, betrayed, and abandoned him. As Pastor Henry Wright (2008) notes, God makes allowance and incorporates all of our sins and weaknesses to produce; as with Romans 8:28, in which all things produce good for those that love God and are called according to his purposes.

God earnestly desires fellowship with us, to walk with us, to love and serve, even with full advanced knowledge of our weaknesses. What amazing grace! The best way to defang condemnation is to recognize that the only failure is to bury our talents and quit trying; but even then, God still loves and provides opportunities for redemption. If you desire to achieve a higher degree of inner peace, become more Christ-like and emulate Jesus and die to the prideful self and embrace the same spirit of pro-active grace, love, forgiveness, and godly discipline with your own failures, sins, and weaknesses as well as the weaknesses and sins of others. To God be the Glory!

Application Questions

1. What areas of your life produce condemnation? What are the root causes?
2. Do you believe that God’s grace is more powerful than your sins, weaknesses, and failures? Why or why not?
3. Are your feelings and behaviors in harmony with your beliefs? Why or why not?

EARNING GRACE

One of the ongoing traps is an intellectual assent to the amazing gift of grace. Many of us, including this author, read the numerous Bible passages on the various forms of grace but they frequently exert a muted influence, given that these seeds of life lie dormant on the hard-pressed ground of iron legalism and a spirit of works. We often understand that Jesus loves us unconditionally, but we behave as if controlled by the works of the law demanding sacrifice and perfect obedience. On two different occasions in which I was basking in the toxic stew of condemnation from a failed personal test of endurance and courage, the Lord spoke words of wisdom and comfort. God is love, and he led me to the wonderful testimony of the power and nature of love by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:5 (*NLT*), “It (love) is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” The Lord said, “Apply this wonderful principle to yourself and others. I (God) don’t keep score, or a record of wrongs, so neither should you (me).”

Love keeps no record of wrongs, as God loves me for who I am (his child made in his image). God’s love is not dependent on what I do or fail to accomplish as a leader, whether I receive healing or deliverance, or what mountains I climb or do not scale, or whether I “cease from my own labors” and cast out the self-effort and works mentality or not.

There are consequences to our sins and disobedience, but God’s love is a constant. Two Scripture passages that address God’s heart clearly in this regard are Isaiah 43:25: “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” And Lamentations 3:22–23: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Do I believe that by doing nothing, I am doing something? One of the greatest lies is in believing I must do “something” to justify and prove that I am worthy of grace. When we are driven, there is a spirit of compulsion rather than the restful yoke of the Lord’s grace. A spirit of works and legalism implicitly states that we do not believe God’s grace is sufficient; we must perform to “earn our keep.” However, one of the key elements of grace is to be a “cheerful receiver” and unconditionally accept God’s grace, and to receive humbly, rather than being the active agent. Do we embrace forgiveness and love unconditionally in the midst of failure? We must reject dwelling in a “failed state” in terms of identity, but the Cross is always the beginning of our healing and is the key “doing” action for a restored and healed future.

Being a hearer and doer in terms of grace, therefore, is accepting God's gift of grace unconditionally; hence, our acceptance act (the doing) is a joyful response to God's actions, a powerful form of faith.

When my self-efforts dominate, it makes the implicit assumption that I am in control, that I am the important causal factor, which is a powerful form of self-worship and idolatry, which in turn leads to a dysfunctional comparison and competition focus. Again, we need to ask the question, "Are God's forgiveness and grace sufficient?" I still struggle with this concept and truth, but this is acceptable with the Lord, as God is patient. God permits us to sin and make mistakes, given his conferral of free will. Our errors produce suffering, which paradoxically, generates godly sorrow and blessings. Failure is not failure; it is part of victory and growth. The times of failure and setbacks do not stop progress, but afford opportunities for deeper learning, godly conviction, and wisdom. Make every effort to rebut perfectionism and obsessive rumination. It provides God with great pleasure when we trust in him and his promises, in spite of how we feel, perform, or fail. It is a great victory to trust God and believe in his triumph, irrespective of our negative emotions, circumstances, or intellect. We please God greatly when we persist and trust him in spite of our problems and fears.

Application Questions

1. How successful are you at learning from failure, both from a spiritual level and in terms of behavior change? Provide examples that illustrate your current state.
2. Do you believe in God's unconditional love and grace? Why or why not?
3. How has God's grace changed you?

REFLECTIONS ON PATIENCE

One of the key elements in practicing patience is the ability to cast our care on the Lord and surrender. We cannot "manage" our problems. Only God's power is the answer. He is the one who will heal according to his will and timing. One of the great challenges of the Christian faith is the concept of surrender. Can we stop trying to fix problems with our own strength and effort? Clearly one important element in our spiritual warfare battles is to use Scripture to rebut our negative thoughts and feelings. However, applying Scripture does not always

relieve the problem immediately. When the issues remain, we become frustrated and then engage in the self-defeating cycle of disappointment, shame, and self-punishment.

This cycle of condemnation is the devil's playground. When faced with deeply engrained strongholds, severe spiritual wounds, and ongoing obsessive rumination, superficial replacement of thoughts is another form of repression that only strengthens their power. We must accept that God heals at his pace, not ours. We must patiently bring the thoughts captive, recognizing that only the power of God's Holy Spirit can heal. If God does not do it, it will not happen. In this spiritual warfare battle of replacing and bringing captive, there are two levels of conflict: that of the soul and that of the spirit. We can know the Word intellectually, but knowledge alone does not penetrate into the soul or the spirit. That is why we need to surrender and allow God and the Holy Spirit to take the Word and make the changes at the spirit level.

The devil brings pressure to "open the door of healing" prematurely. We are not responsible for changing the deep wounds. We lack the ability and we will only exhaust ourselves in the attempt. The key is to cast the burden on him and reject dwelling on our inadequacies. Only God empowers, and we are powerless to do it without him. It is God's responsibility, not ours, to complete the deep healing. Our healing often becomes an issue of pride, in which we want to solve the problem and assume the glory. Resist the devil by drawing closer to God.

The more that we attempt to change ourselves, the more we limit God. We are like a drowning man, and we must be still and allow the lifeguard of existence to rescue us. Our struggling is the product of fear and our lack of faith, a form of spiritual quicksand. A powerful quote by Oswald Chambers from the July 21st entry in his devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* reinforces this point, "The bedrock in Jesus Christ's Kingdom is poverty, not possession; not decisions for Jesus Christ, but a sense of absolute futility—I cannot begin to do it. If God doesn't do it, it won't get done." In our efforts, there are three key principles:

- a. Pray for the strength to recognize and separate the "wheat from the chaff" regarding our efforts and what God must do in the healing process. This balance is an organic and shifting mix. We must reject perfectionism in this process, as we cannot be one hundred percent accurate in our discernment and trust.
- b. Learn to recognize when we engage in self-effort and "fear faith," in which we quote twenty verses of Scripture in the hope that a few will have an effect (Wright, 2008). In reality, they all work. However, the healing is not always apparent or instant. Hence, whether we

- use one or twelve, we must meditate on them individually and use them in faith, knowing that each has power. Be patient. Use Scripture, but first seek God's presence with a partnership in which the Holy Spirit is in command. Enter into his presence, and then use Scripture as directed by the Lord. There is no condemnation for using Scripture in fear faith, as God understands the motives of our heart, is lovingly patient, and always desires and promotes our best.
- c. Recognize that we will never achieve perfection in bringing the vain thoughts captive. What God desires is ongoing good faith attempts. God makes allowance for our sins, fears, doubts, failures, and weaknesses. He knows that we are as dust. God wants us to grow through our struggles.

One of the most powerful strategies is to simply replace and rest using God's peace. Authors Kris Vallotton and Bill Johnson recounted a powerful story of how one of them was undergoing sustained demonic attacks. No matter what he tried, quoting Scripture, praying, exorcism, none of these conventional strategies drove out the demonic presence. At his wit's end in desperate prayer, God stated softly, "Respond by resting in my peace!" At the next appearance of the demon, in spite of his fear, he simply rolled over and went to sleep. The demonic presence never returned. In effect, he admitted his inability to defeat the entity out of his own efforts. As each conventional method failed, it increased his personal fear, further empowering the enemy. When he stopped trying to cast out the demon using Christian tools, but on his own strength, and relied simply on the peace and presence of God, victory came to him. He was still afraid, but relying on the protection of Jesus and emulating the confidence of Jesus as he fell asleep in the boat in the midst of the storm, which was the necessary act of faith. My wife Connie confirmed this principle with an account of a similar demonic attack at a convent. The devil terrified a visitor by sitting on the bed, and the nuns provided curious advice, "Just ignore him and do not fight through your own strength." The result was the same as the demonic forces eventually ceased. We must recognize that victory is not always immediate and we must ask God, through the Holy Spirit, for the ability to "fall asleep" in the presence of the enemy. This "falling asleep" is a process and takes time. My prayer is that you will fall asleep with every fear thought that afflicts you. Your fears will not keep you from achieving your servant leader destiny. The only way to impede your destiny is to give up and let fear control your mind. I pray that you will have the strength to rest in God's peace and be more than a conqueror.

Application Questions

1. Describe an area in your life that seems resistant to prayer or the Word. How does this area affect your life?
2. Conduct research in the area described above. What Scripture passages are most relevant to addressing the problem?
3. What other resources would be helpful in improving your ability to cope and gain victory?

PATIENCE IN THE STORM

In your patience possess ye your souls (Luke 21:19, *KJV*).

As Christians, we are not immune from the power and influence of spiritual strongholds that control our emotions, thoughts, and behavior. Strongholds develop for a host of reasons, including inherited mental illness. As such, these generational strongholds are very resilient, given that they influence brain chemistry, body physiology, and our conscious and subconscious thought patterns. Those with anxiety and mood disorders face even greater challenges and obstacles in this area. It is very frustrating and demoralizing to be unable to be a “hearer and doer,” given the intensity of the negative emotions and the repetitive controlling behaviors driven by distorted thinking. However, God does not leave us defenseless. He provides his Word and the Holy Spirit to help us endure and change what we cannot.

For example, in the area of anxiety and panic disorders, the fact that the Bible presents some form of “fear not” command 365 times demonstrates the presence and power of fear. In our battle with fear, knowledge of how to blunt its influence is not enough. One of the foundational spiritual warfare strategies is to use the Word of God as Jesus did in his temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11). We do not argue with the devil or with our strongholds, but rebut and replace our fearful thoughts with God’s promises of protection.

We can quote the entire Bible, but unless we are “hearers and doers” of the Word, we remain in the wilderness. I did not learn this important principle until later in my life walk. I would get very frustrated when simply quoting Scripture was ineffective in changing my thoughts, moods, or emotions. We must not punish or condemn ourselves and walk in shame if replacing negative thoughts with Scripture does not eliminate fear and the associated obsessive contemplation and introspection. We can quote the entire Bible, but it will not eliminate the feelings and thoughts immediately, and we must combine our

knowledge with faith and become a believer (hearer) and a doer by facing our fears with wisdom. Only God's presence and deep healing power, not our efforts, can conquer these genetic strongholds.

Whether we possess genetically inherited or trauma-based fear strongholds, they both produce powerful neural pathways with associated dysfunctional emotions, thoughts, and behaviors designed ironically to protect us from the hurt and pain that these threats pose to our safety, security, and self-esteem. However, these neural pathways are inappropriate and ineffective in solving the problem and for responding to conditions in the present. Unless we attack these strongholds at their root, we continue to relive and respond to current and future events according to the same distorted patterns.

There is hope and healing, however. Through the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit we develop new neural pathways with God-honoring and healthy memories, emotions, and associated belief systems. We become the hearers and doers through exchanging our flawed emotions for God's view with his perfect peace. In essence, we discard our defective lenses for God's 20/20 vision.

What is not faith is sin (Romans 14:23), but we must recognize that we cannot destroy and heal these strongholds: only God can. It is important not to punish yourself for not being able to succeed on your own efforts and manufacture healing faith. Satan the accuser gleefully reminds us of our weaknesses and failures, distorting our image to steal our birthright of creation in God's image and being the recipients of unconditional love and grace. Satan desperately disguises the powerful truth that we do not have to achieve perfection in order to make progress. Satan wants to keep us ignorant of the full set of belief and action factors (to be a hearer and doer) required for complete deliverance. As the Scriptures state, "My people perish for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6) God's Word will work; however, it is not enough to know, but we must be active believers and participants, not intellectual adherents, as even the demons believe (James 2:19).

We must know, believe, and "live it out." As Pastor Wright states (2008), true faith trusts God for a good outcome when facing our fears, irrespective of whether we receive the object of our faith. We trust in a relationship, a spiritual state of being. Do not beat yourself up for the amount of time it takes to heal and the power of the opposition. Anxiety and mood disorders are deeply engrained subconscious and conscious belief systems that influence mind, body, and soul. We believe with our heart, and sin affects our hearts, wounding them. If we only operate at the knowledge and belief level, and we are not doers, we will be double-minded and unstable.

We must recognize the power of the subconscious and the associated memory and brain patterns, linked to our physiology. These conscious and subconscious belief systems produce unique physiological, psychological, and spiritual responses. We must surrender and permit the Holy Spirit to challenge, heal, and change the subconscious genetic and belief systems. These patterns cause us to react and think at the conscious level before we realize it. We empower our strongholds if we listen to the “what-if” worries and deny what God has given us in terms of the good.

Wisdom is essential, but we must practice, live, and apply the principles. Satan will try to use these genetic and belief systems to alter our physiology and brain patterns in order to control us. We must move forward in spite of the storm of emotions and physical responses in the knowing, believing, and doing realms, as Jesus demonstrated in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the wilderness. When our genetics, physiology, and thinking are in conflict with God’s Word, we must make the choice to agree with biblical promises and move forward in spite of the genetic, physiological, emotional, and spiritual resistance of wounded hearts. The Holy Spirit will protect, change, and heal, if we surrender and allow him to fight the battle. However, this process requires time and patience, gradually gaining victory as we repent and “work out our salvation” with fear and trembling.

The pattern of healing is one of incremental gains and losses, an ongoing pattern of resistance and retreat reflecting the challenge of consistently gaining agreement at the knowledge, belief, and practice level. To be doers, we must believe that God will change what we are unable to change and break those stubborn and repetitive patterns. We will heal, but scars will remain on our genes, mind, body, and heart. These scars become sources of temptation, and the key is to apply the blood of Jesus to our past and present sins and failures and be patient. Remember that the dark spiritual powers do not respond to intellectual knowledge and belief. Like the men who tried to cast out demons on their own power and authority (Acts 19:14–16), our strongholds will not respond. As authors Vallotton and Johnson (2006) urge in their excellent book *The Supernatural Ways of Royalty*, we must reject intense and obsessive competitive and comparative rumination and introspection and view our past with the blood of Jesus and his grace. This line of reasoning reinforces our new nature and identity in Christ. I am not a sinner (identity), but a saint who sometime sins. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!

Application Questions

1. What types of strongholds exert an influence on your family?
2. What actions are you taking to identify strongholds and make the necessary changes?
3. How can you help others overcome their strongholds?

GRATITUDE: A GREAT BLESSING OF THANKSGIVING FOR GOD'S DIVINE COMFORT

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong 2 (Corinthians 12:9–10).

As we reflect on our blessings as servant leaders, I urge you to meditate and be thankful for God's attributes. One of the greatest gifts of God is the comfort he provides as we trek through the “worldly sorrow” emotions that burden our souls. When we are lost in the wilderness of pain, sorrow, self-pity, depression, and fear, his healing rain provides sweet relief. When we seek the Lord with an earnest desire, we find a gentle voice that eases the pain with his tender touch. Below are twelve principles of divine comfort that are water on the lips of a man parched in the desert.

- *Principle 1: Eternal Love:* God did, does, and will always love you and me unconditionally. If you doubt this, remember that Jesus sacrificed the most for us when we were at our worst! He first loved us while we were sinners mired in our unsaved state of condemnation.
- *Principle 2: Unconditional Forgiveness:* It is a great joy to realize that God blesses us with 360-degree eternal forgiveness! Jesus forgives all my sins, past, present, and future. The blood of Jesus protects and cleanses us and quiets the voices of fear, guilt, condemnation, shame, and doubt emanating from our flesh and the demonic realm. Jesus is tearing down the walls and identifying all the sources of unforgiveness. Take comfort, as Jesus is our advocate, lawyer, and redeemer!
- *Principle 3: Amazing Grace:* Grace is God's love in action. It involves all elements of the Trinity, and with full development in the

New Testament redemptive covenant of complete forgiveness of sins. Remember that grace covers every failure, sin, and weakness. Grace is the foundation for abundant living. Ponder the formula that ongoing weakness + God's grace = Abundant Life. Embracing grace is one of the most powerful forms of belief and faith. It is a sin of pride to reject God's grace. We must humbly accept this great gift and apply it liberally to our wounds, sins, temptations, and weaknesses. The Holy Spirit is the comforter, teacher counselor, and provider of grace. God's grace is always with us and we must build our homes upon its rock solid foundation. Grace softens and purifies the motives of our heart, freeing us from the bondage of legalism and a spirit of works. When we desire to earn a reward from God, it is very easy for Satan to transform our motives into a "works spirit" that becomes a cruel taskmaster, given the need to perform and accomplish instead of simply being in relationship. Grace meets us where we are, and we do not need to be "cleaned up," as the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) clearly illustrates, when the father runs toward the distantly viewed son and then joyously hugs and embraces his pathetically downtrodden and sin-stained child.

- *Principle 4: Surrender and Cease from Our Own Labors.* God earnestly desires that we surrender, rest, and cease from our own labors and take his yoke upon us. Liberation occurs when we recognize that God is responsible for the outcome and harvest. It is all about God. Our role is simply to obey and love. We must learn to accept some degree of ambiguity. We cannot analyze as God does, and peace follows when we rest in the storm of unanswered questions and humbly and patiently wait for him. As Zechariah 4:6 states, it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" that we enter into his rest. God's plans, directions, and purpose are always for our good. His wisdom and ways are infinitely higher and better than ours are!
- *Principle 5: God is Patient.* God is never frustrated or angered in human emotional terms. He is patient whether I obey or not, act or not, agree or not, and this takes away the burden of legalistically having to please God. We do not have to change all at once; only God can provide instantaneous transformation, and in most cases, it is contrary to his will to "zap" us, given that we need gradual transformation to build character, faith, patience, and empathy. These attributes are the foundation of a ministry of healing that God creates with our tears and scars. The comfort we are given, we give to others. As it notes in Zechariah 4:10, we are not to despise the days

of small beginnings and we are to remember that the Lord will not let us be tempted and tested beyond our ability to bear.

- *Principle 6: Choose Life:* Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) challenges the people of Israel about which God to serve, Jehovah or Baal. When we intentionally or unintentionally worship the many idols of this world, the sin produced results in slavery, which in turn leads to both physical and spiritual death if not redeemed by the blood of Jesus. We must worship the Lord our God and him alone in order to achieve victory over the death spirit. When we love others or things above God, it always results in death for some aspect of God's will and desire to bless our lives. However, the pain and suffering is the basis for godly conviction that enables us to plow the fallow ground and sow seed that brings new life when we confess, repent, and renounce. In God's economy, nothing is wasted or in vain!
- *Principle 7: Remain in the Precious Present:* It is a great challenge to remain mindful and engaged in the "precious present." Society conditions us to multi-task in our physical and psychological inner space, simultaneously wrestling with the past, present, and future. We must cease from the futile, vain, and restless striving to control our lives and allow God to manage history, the current moment, and the unknown future. God gives us the eternal victory and our job is to apply that truth in the omnipresent storms of the "now." God only gives us the strength to face the trials of the moment. We must resist the temptation to live in the past or the future. Our charge is to learn from the past, and ask for his guidance in recalling the markers of his deliverance and applying that principle to the present situation. We must reapply God's lessons and promises to rest in the eternal present every day, not in a legalistic and mechanical fashion, but with childlike faith. God gives strength and we must relearn the lessons in a new context. We cannot take our past lessons for granted. It is critical to focus on the markers that God places in our hearts to mark the successes of the past, while being open to the new season. We must apply the principles in a fashion adapted to the unique challenges of today, as we only have the present. This reduces the intense pressure we place on ourselves and associated futile anxiety and worry it produces. As stated in Matthew 6:27, by being anxious I cannot add a single second to my lifespan! As God takes care of the lilies, take joy and comfort in the victories of trusting, forgiving, and persisting in the moment.
- *Principle 8: God is Responsible for the Increase:* God, not our efforts or talent, is responsible for the fruit, the healing, and the change,

both within us and with others. This reduces the pressure to “perform” and reinforces the power of godly excellence, which entails embracing obedience, humility, and character growth. This assurance enables us to love others and ourselves in the appropriate fashion, with the combination of support, encouragement, and necessary “tough love” accountability. We must always ask for the Lord’s power and guidance to base our motives on agape love, which helps guard our heart from guilt, condemnation, and manipulation.

- *Principle 9: God Will Not Test Us beyond Our Ability to Endure:* Romans 8:28 clearly states that all things work out for the best for those who love God. This means that in all circumstances, the Lord will not test or tempt us beyond our ability to bear the burden. This provides powerful reassurance that, irrespective of how large and powerful the Goliaths and strongholds that we face, God’s power to protect is always greater! Another key element is to reject any form of comparison with others regarding the size or nature of our problems. God does not use a comparative standard in terms of the objective size or strength of our enemies or judge us on a relative standard of strength and courage. He is equally pleased with the “timid and fearful” who learn to trust God and face their fears of a mouse as he is with the brave warrior who is facing lions. Never despise the day of small beginnings!
- *Principle 10: Godly Discipline is Always for Our Benefit:* God uses trials to discipline us, and his discipline bears pleasant fruit when we humble ourselves and surrender our will. Every thought has the power of life and death, and Satan attempts to influence our thinking to plant seeds of doubt, unbelief, and fear that impede God’s purpose. How do you hear the voice of Jesus? Even in those Bible passages in which he voices anger and frustration, the motive was love, as evidenced by his actions. He always forgave and moved on. He was patient with reoccurring failure. He never abandoned or rejected, even when his beloved disciples fled, and he returned love, forgiveness, and peace for failure and sin.
- *Principle 11: God’s Strength is Made Perfect in My Weakness:* This is one of the most comforting but humbling lessons. Christians are victors and victorious, but this triumph is based upon a radically different definition of success and excellence than the secular world and culture utilizes. Victory and success in God’s eyes entails: (1) loving him unconditionally, (2) obedience to his commands and will, (3) recognizing, confessing, repenting, and renouncing our sins, (4) learning from our mistakes and failures,

(5) learning to love, and (6) forgiving and offering grace to others and ourselves. It is not an outcome-based perspective. It is when we are weak and in a failed state that we most clearly recognize that our strength, victory, and power come from God. An attitude of humble strength acknowledges that all of our talents, gifts, and abilities, all of our successes and accomplishments, our ability to focus, work hard and persist, all are gifts from God; hence we cannot boast. When we are successful, pride insidiously infects our ability to assign the appropriate locus of responsibility to God and redirects it to our character and “worthiness.” Failure is very effective at penetrating the defenses and placing us back on the correct path.

- *Principle 12: Failure Builds Character:* God is unequivocally pleased with us, even when we fail and sin, if we assume a humble attitude of repentance. God would rather have us fail and recognize our sin (like the tax collector in Luke 18:13), than to be successful for the wrong motives, means, or ends (no love motive), which blinds us to the greater and deeper sin of pride. I inherited a judgmental, Pharisaical spirit. I made a vow not to be like my father who was a legalist and perfectionist, but inconsistent and harsh in his discipline. However, in my attempt to separate myself, I failed to acknowledge the good in my dad and became a prisoner of unforgiveness. The inner vow to reject my dad created the very thing I loathed, as I internalized the legalism and the associated self-belittlement, shame, and condemnation. I have learned to forgive my dad for the same reason I desire forgiveness: to set the captive free and share God’s grace and mercy.

I pray that you will dedicate yourselves to being hearers and doers of the Word, and that these principles will be a source of godly blessing and encouragement

Application Questions

1. How has failure shaped your character? What lesson is most important?
2. How do your character weaknesses influence your ability to serve God?
3. What is the role of God’s grace in your life? How can you increase the presence and power of God’s grace in your life and that of others?

THE CHAPTERS OF OUR LIVES

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed (Psalm 139:16).

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).

Our lives are precious to God, and every day we are making illustrated entries with our thoughts, words, and actions into God's Book of Life. In effect, every human being throughout history is a chapter in this most precious volume. Every chapter contains images and words that weave a wondrous tapestry that is distinctively and beautifully tailored for each person's unique purpose, calling, and gifts. God's Book of Life in effect contains the spiritual genetic DNA that is the foundation of our life. The great mystery is how God balances the paradox of our free will with predestination. One of the greatest challenges is to reject the temptation to plagiarize our chapter entries. In essence, God creates a unique "job description" for each person, with distinctive goals, duties, knowledge, skills, abilities, and spiritual gifts. If one fails to honor the job description requirements, it becomes a pernicious form of rebellion, giving birth to sin and denying the world the special contributions that only that person can provide. One element of our Christian walk is to seek to uncover, understand, and honor our true job description. It is only when we surrender our pride to the Lord and accept his job description that we can truly love ourselves as God commands and resist serving false gods. When we engage in comparison envy, pride, or complacency, and attempt to live the life of another, we "cheat" on our test and plagiarize our life entries.

We clearly discern and experience this reality and presence of uniqueness in our families. The Lord blessed me with an angelic and beautiful wife Connie and three wonderful daughters, Alyssa, Sandra, and Christin. Each of them possesses an inimitable combination of physical, personality, and spiritual characteristics that bless me as a husband and father. I would like to share one such diamond from each of the gardens. Connie, my wife, demonstrates every day that God loves me by how she dedicates her life to serving the needs of others. She is truly my angel in white. My oldest daughter Alyssa is a rare daisy flower of unassuming grace, radiating warmth and engaging others at the heart level. Sandra, my middle daughter, is a lily of the

valley who has a heart of compassion and love. My youngest daughter Christin is a rose who brings harmony and peace to the room. They are all honoring their unique God-given job descriptions, enriching my life with their distinctive ways of loving God and others. Let us make the commitment to honor God by being ourselves and not trying to usurp the job description of another. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. Do you believe that God has provided a unique job description for each of us? Why or why not?
2. What is a distinctive element of your spiritual job description?
3. How can you help others recognize their unique spiritual job description?

THE GOLDEN VERSUS THE PLATINUM RULE

Do to others as you would have them do to you (Luke 6:31)

As Christian servant leaders, we will be pummeled with an endless array of novel strategies to improve organizational performance. Many of these will be leadership related, including means to enhance our emotional intelligence, reasoning skills, negotiation abilities, stress management, vision casting, promoting innovation, and conflict resolution capabilities, among others. The goal is to enhance both leadership behavior and performance by augmenting critical competencies. When analyzed more deeply, many of these “new” approaches are recycled from previous leadership theory and practice, such as Management by Objectives (MBO), but with new “packaging.” One critical area receives little attention in a relative sense to the detriment of leadership development. Not surprisingly, it is the cultivation of virtue and character. Why is that the case? One explanation relates to the general erosion of societal emphasis on the importance of virtuous character in organizational success. Character’s role is acknowledged, even touted as foundational, but with a concurrent absence of sustained and systematic investment in character growth. The assumption is that our character as an adult is relatively stable and not amenable to change. This view is contrary to biblical principles and practical experience. One of the great blessings of our faith is our growth in wisdom and character through the sanctification process. In most leadership development efforts, the preponderance of the focus

is on identifying and reducing the negative influence of poor character in subordinates. This is consistent with the ubiquitous human proclivity to focus on the character weaknesses of others and avoid the painful self-analysis and introspection of addressing our personal character flaws. This produces a higher emphasis on programs and practices that use external means to promote ethical conduct through rules, regulations, training, and electronic oversight. There may be intensive assessment to assess character at the selection stage for line employees, but very little for management and leadership. Interestingly, one relatively recent approach addresses leadership character in a profound fashion, that of the "Platinum Rule." The Platinum Rule is a variant of the Golden Rule "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" as seen in Matthew 6:31. The Platinum Rule reverses the focus and states, "Do unto others as they would like to have done to them" (Alessandra & O'Connor, 1996). The choice of the word "platinum" is intentional to connote a principle of higher value and influence. On the surface, the Platinum Rule appears to be an elevated form of moral reasoning. However, instead of the moral referent standard being biblical principles, the focus is on how others view their best personal interests. Hence, it is consistent with a post-modern perspective in which moral standards are relative to the perception, experiences, and culture of the other person. The justification for the Platinum Rule derives primarily from business relationships in which the needs of the customer should supersede that of the organization providing the goods or service. Hence it is viewed as a form of empowerment for consumers. Viewed in this light, it makes good business practice as well as demonstrating empathy. However, even in the business world, this concept introduces a cunning deception that substitutes moral reasoning with self-interest. When this rule is extended into employer-employee relationships or to other life domains, even greater moral and practical obstacles arise. However, before we address the problems, let us address the assumptions underlying the Golden Rule.

The Golden Rule is a primary tenet of Christianity. It reflects the internalization of the "letter and spirit" of biblical principles: the foundational spiritual "cause and effect" relationships that promote empathy, altruism, and delaying or denying self-gratification. These are the "laws written in the human heart" that Paul references in Romans 2:15. However, in order for the Golden Rule to be internalized and applied consistently, we need to be led by the Holy Spirit. The Golden Rule requires us to embrace God's global definition of love and how to promote the best interests of others. No one can accurately and morally practice the Golden Rule without being led by

the Lord, given that our personal moral failings, self-interest, and subconscious wounds and strongholds impede and distort our motivation and ability to place the interests of others either on the same level or greater than our own. Our weaknesses also distort the assessment process of identifying and promoting the true needs of others, thereby impeding the appropriate action. Hence our sensing, reasoning, motivational, and behavioral abilities are distorted. As we have illustrated throughout the book, love in God's definition is the delicate balance between grace, mercy, and "tough love" accountability in which we speak truth and take actions that may be painful or rejected by the other person, but are in their best interests.

For example, our political system in the United States is not a "Platinum Rule" democracy in which the purpose of our government is to meet the desires (wants) of our citizens. The purpose of government is to promote the broader public interest enabling the long-term wellbeing, safety, and security of our populace. Our system of government is not a "majority rule" democracy in which 50.1 percent makes the law of the land. Our founding fathers instituted a republic in which our elected representatives make decisions in our interests as stewards, not as waiters in a restaurant who must take "orders" from the public. Hence there are many instances in which the desires of the public, if implemented, would result in long-term harm. For example, most citizens would support tax decreases. Adopting the Platinum Rule decision-making framework would incentivize huge reductions in taxes to the detriment of other key public interests such as quality schools. The same logic can be extended to all levels of human conduct. There are many, desires, wants, and needs that we possess that, if provided, would be injurious to others and ourselves.

The Platinum Rule is a moral affront even in the business world. Without Golden Rule values, businesses can justify selling products and services that are in great demand, but harmful to the consumer or the larger society. We see the effects of this practice in the "supersizing" of fast food, contributing to obesity and the associated public health problems. The same principle applies to products such as tobacco, alcohol, and gambling. There needs to be Golden Rule accountability limits placed on our free enterprise products.

Let us now return to the workplace. As a supervisor, if you employ the Platinum Rule, employees that desire empowerment and increased autonomy, who are not sufficiently skilled or do not possess the required character elements, would be empowered at a higher level than is in their or the organization's long term interest. In these cases, the supervisor who employs the Golden Rule will recognize that

premature levels of empowerment are harmful to the employee's interest and well-being. Hence, he or she will exercise "tough love" and delay investing additional authority until the employee is ready. They will provide the necessary remedial training and coaching to help the employee correct problems and grow in competency. This requires great character strength and love on the part of the manager who resists the temptation to "people please." As with the army drill sergeant who is disliked or even hated at the time of training but revered after combat experience demonstrating the value and necessity of the discipline, our employees will recognize godly love in operation.

As Christian servant leaders, we clearly must promote empathetic relationships in which we learn the needs, desires, and underlying motivational elements of those that we serve. The Platinum Rule has a place in relationships, but it cannot exceed the Golden Rule without great moral harm. We cannot let desires and needs supersede our "good shepherd" stewardship duties to love others authentically. I pray for the Lord's wisdom and courage to apply the Golden Rule to glorify God and help others.

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your personal approach to treating others? Do you promote the Golden Rule, the Platinum Rule, or something in between?
2. Can you think of a situation in which either you applied the Platinum Rule to others or it was applied to you? What was the result?
3. What are your greatest obstacles in applying the Golden Rule and how can they be overcome?

GODLY REPENTANCE

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

One of the other constants in life, beside death and taxes, is human sin, mistakes, and failure. As Christian servant leaders, how we cope with our sins, failures, and mistakes is a "window to our heart" revealing to ourselves and others the breadth and depth of our Christian character. As Christians, the beginning of accountability lies in repentance. Repentance is a complex and easily misunderstood term. The nature of

repentance does vary by theological perspective, however, my goal here is to provide a servant leadership-based definition founded upon Scripture. Repentance at its root is a change of direction in terms of our motives and actions, away from the evil and toward the good (BibleStudyTools, 2014).

From a biblical standpoint, there are two forms of repentance. The first is our repentance from “other Gods” of self-love and worship to accepting Jesus as savior and Lord and admitting our total inability to cleanse our sins and live a righteous life with only our own strength. This is the “Kingdom of Heaven is with us” form of repentance that John the Baptist preached (Matthew 3) and which all who later accept Jesus as savior embrace. The second is the “working out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) in which we repent of our daily intentional and unintentional sins as we walk life’s path (Pennock, 2014). The key principle is recognizing that only God’s grace, not our effort, is the basis both for our salvation and our ability to grow in Christ-likeness through the sanctification process. Hence, we can only achieve repentance with God’s power, not ours. Repentance entails the elements of genuine sorrow and regret for the action. Hence there are three elements. The repenting process triggers a state of contrition that results in changed motives and actions. Another key element is renouncing the action, which is to disavow any lingering emotional ties to the practice. As it states in 2 Corinthians 7:10, only godly sorrow leads to repentance. Godly sorrow is an authentic expression of remorse that is grounded in the knowledge that our action was sinful and displeased God and hurt ourselves and others. It makes a genuine attempt to recompense the victims of our action and to learn how to avoid making the same error in the future, thereby learning from the situation. Repentance is a hopeful response, as godly sorrow demonstrates our faith and trust in God as a loving and forgiving Father, not as a cruel taskmaster keeping cosmic score. Worldly sorrow is born of anger at failing and being discovered or exposed. It does not acknowledge the underlying moral failure and the negative consequences for ourselves as well as those that we hurt. It also rejects God’s love and forgiveness, preferring the bitter loneliness of one’s pride to the rebuke of the Father. It is self-centered, resulting in a further hardening of the heart and the searing of the conscience. The ultimate fruit of worldly sorrow is a spiritual death in which one chooses to retain the pain, guilt, and responsibility for the consequences. When we keep our sins, it provides an opening for Satan to both “stoke the fire” of anger and bitterness, and grants permission for him to accuse us before God and within the confines of our mind’s inner dialogue.

The great biblical example is the contrasting response of David and Saul to failure and sin, in the Old Testament, and Judas and Peter in the New Testament. For each failure and sin, Saul continually rejected genuine repentance, preferring to blame others, God, or circumstances for his disobedience. Hence, Saul never accepted responsibility, never asked for forgiveness, and nor did he learn from his mistakes; hence, there were no elements of genuine repentance. For example, when Saul disobeyed God and did not completely destroy the Amalekites, Saul admitted to fear of man and blamed his subjects in 1 Samuel 15:24, as Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." Saul exhibited an ongoing pattern of disobedience, thereby demonstrating a true lack of repentance. David, on the other hand, when he committed leadership sins such as ordering a census of his troops (2 Samuel 24) and having Uriah, the husband of Beersheba, killed to cover up his adultery with her (2 Samuel 11:5–27), repented and learned from his mistakes never repeating overt disobedience to God. In the New Testament, Peter's denial of Jesus led to his godly sorrow, repentance, and restoration (see John 21), while Judas rejected forgiveness, embracing worldly sorrow, thus leading to his suicide (see Matthew 27).

Let us now address our role as servant leaders. When we genuinely repent and change direction for a leadership sin or error, our employees take notice. We first must repent before the Lord, asking for his forgiveness and the power to change direction. We then should ask for guidance on how and when to express repentance to the larger organization. The key is credibility and genuine contrition. Staged and inauthentic expressions of repentance will only facilitate the cultivation of hypocrisy, further eroding trust. The nature of the repentance is a function of the context of the sin or failure. If the issue relates to a single employee with no witnesses, then a private meeting communicating contrition, assuming responsibility, admitting guilt, asking for repentance, and pledging restoration is the first step. If the issue affects a larger group, then the setting needs to be more public and in the presence of the affected group. If the issue influences the organization as a whole, then the steps are the same, but the scope is wider. Clearly these are moments that test our humility and obedience. Another key element is assuming responsibility for sins committed by predecessors, subordinates, or others under your authority. This is another critical element of leadership. As Daniel (Daniel 9:2) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:7) accepted responsibility for the collective sins of the nation of Israel, leaders must assume the burden for moral

and performance failures of their organizations. When contrition is sincere, this helps to heal the wounds and increase trust in the credibility of the leader and the organization. This is clearly the path less traveled, but is absolutely essential for the servant leader.

Application Questions

1. What areas of your life need repentance and why? What are the effects of the absence of repentance?
2. How effective are you at repenting? What are the obstacles that you face in adopting an attitude of repentance and how can they be overcome?
3. What is the effect of the absence of repentance on a relationship? How can they be repaired?

GOD'S WISDOM

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you (James 1:5).

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. Moreover, a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace (James 3:13–18).

Servant leaders must aspire to wisdom, as wisdom is the state of mature Christian character development in which our thinking, decision making, and behavior are directed by the Holy Spirit according to God's word and will. Hence, it requires knowledge, correct belief, and orthopraxis, or correct conduct. However, an often overlooked element is the surrender of our self-sufficiency. We must humble ourselves and ask God for his wisdom. This seeking of the wisdom of the logos (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit is not a onetime event, but a daily practice of the spiritually mature servant leader. We need God's wisdom every single day as no human being is omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient. Whether we are addressing a complex service delivery

problem, an unruly employee, or a difficult client or customer, we need the wisdom of a higher power.

As Christian servant leaders, this reinforces the charge to “pray without ceasing” found in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. This requires daily intercessory prayer in which we ask God for the wisdom for the day. It also entails proactive specific prayer for situations that require astuteness when we have advance notice, such as an upcoming disciplinary meeting with a chronically underperforming employee. Finally, it requires our commitment to spontaneous prayer when situations are unfolding. This is the most difficult time to pray when our mind and emotions are fully engaged, leaving little conscious awareness for the need for prayer. The good news here is that in the heat of battle, God does not expect long petitions, only an awareness of our need for his wisdom, provision, and protection, and a brief supplication for wisdom and guidance. The more that we are able to pray spontaneously while under “fire,” the more equipped we will become for the spiritual warfare battles.

Another frequently overlooked wisdom element is to pray that other persons will pray themselves and submit to the wisdom and authority of God. Hence, we should not only promote a heart orientation to develop wisdom in ourselves, but in others too. This is especially important with those that oppose, dislike, or persecute us. This is a recognition of the power of God to redeem and transform situations and our hearts generating in us the character humility to “love our enemies.”

How do we know that we are operating with godly wisdom in the workplace? As the Scripture passage from James 3 demonstrates, wisdom produces the fruit of the spirit, including peace and gentleness that melts hardened hearts. The fruit of wisdom, in turn, produces flexibility and a willingness to see the views and perspectives of others, generates empathy producing mercy, and finally the expelling of partiality and hypocrisy, in essence, a workplace climate of trust. As with all servant leader character attributes, the cultivation of wisdom is a lifelong process.

As I reflect on my on walk as I approach, with God’s grace, the sixth decade of my life, I realize that I have made much progress in growing in godly wisdom, but I am also humbly aware of the great gaps and distances I have yet to travel. This awareness is necessary to both encourage us as well as motivate us to avoid complacency. Each stage of life in our leadership journey presents novel challenges while repeating ongoing confrontation with long-term strongholds in our areas of weakness.

For example, I am learning as a leader to focus my attention first and foremost on the “audience of one,” defining success not in my or in other’s terms, but by God’s standards (Colossians 3:23–24). This is not an abdication of our charge to love our neighbor as we would love ourselves, but a recognition that I cannot truly love anyone with eternal wisdom unless I focus on God first and receive his wisdom. As a leader, how do I know if grace or discipline is required for a problem employee without first asking for wisdom and then removing the log from my own eye and assuming responsibility for my contribution to the problem. Wisdom recognizes that the goal is not perfect understanding, but a soft heart toward God that acknowledges incremental growth interspersed with epiphany-inducing moments of clarity and breakthrough. The cycle begins with a problem that creates tension, prompting us to “cry out” to the Lord. After a period of time, we begin to understand the motivations and cause-effect relationships and reach a moment of epiphany. We then will spend a long time learning to apply the knowledge and revelation, thereby cultivating wisdom—as we learn by doing. I pray for the Lord’s grace and favor to fill you with his wisdom.

Application Questions

1. In what areas of your life do you require an infusion of God’s wisdom?
2. What are several of the key obstacles or barriers to developing more godly wisdom in your life, and how can they be overcome?
3. How can you help others develop wisdom?

CHAPTER 7



GOD'S DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

SERVANT LEADER JUDGMENT

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye (Matthew 7:3–5).

One of the most important leadership dimensions relates to the judgment process. Servant leaders are called upon to make important decisions in such areas as performance management, selection and promotion, discipline, and the cultivation of organizational ethics and morality, among other key areas. By judgment, we are referring to the process of determining the level of individual or group accountability and responsibility for decisions and behavior. As with almost all servant leader principles, these types of decisions entail balancing competing values and principles, and hence they are nuanced, thus requiring the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Servant leaders are responsible for the overall promotion of order, peace, stability, organizational wellbeing, and mission achievement. Therefore, there will be difficult decisions related to human conduct that manifest profound implications for the welfare of organizational members and their families. A good place to begin relates to a biblical view of judgment. What are the key principles?

First, it is important to distinguish judgments regarding behavior from God's sole role in determining our eternal fate. Only God can judge salvation, hence we have no role in determining a person's identity other than that we are all children of God in daily need of God's

forgiveness and grace. As Christians, we can judge actions relative to sin, but not how God views the person or how the actions are judged from a salvation or long-term sanctification standpoint. If we would judge King David's actions of adultery and murder in human terms (2 Samuel 12), we would have concluded that David would not retain God's favor and salvation.

Both the Bible and social science research are in agreement regarding key human tendencies in the judgment process (Taggar & Neubert, 2004). In regards to our personal degree of accountability in situations of judgment, the natural human inclination is to assign blame for negative outcomes to others in the form of their lack of ability, motivation, or skill, rather than the influence of external factors beyond the person's control. The converse is true for positive outcomes, as we have a tendency to take responsibility for success, discounting the influence of other people or external factors. When the judgment process centers on the responsibility levels of others, the "poles" are reversed and we are more likely to assign personal responsibility for negative outcomes to the person's lack of character or ability and discount mitigating external factors beyond their control. From a biblical standpoint, we need look no further than the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and blamed the serpent and each other for the negative outcomes. We have a tendency to desire mercy and forgiveness for our own sins and failures, while asking for justice and accountability with others.

What are the biblical "Ten Commandment" principles related to the judgment process? They are listed below.

1. Servant leaders understand that the judgment process is another form of God's love. Judgment is a means for speaking truth to others to promote their best interests and wellbeing. In biblical terms, when God judges, it is a last chance effort to gain the attention of humanity and convince them to repent and change their ways before it is too late.
2. Discipline is the second form of God's judgmental love. The goal of discipline is to gain the person's attention, to define the nature and consequences of the deleterious attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors, to clearly explain the rationale and nature for the corrective discipline and the negative consequences for the person and the organization if the issues are not corrected.
3. Judgment in biblical terms entails a respect and love for others. Judgment does not condemn, label, or stereotype others. It differentiates identity from behavior. Jesus judged the behavior and

actions of others, not their identities. For example, Jesus referred to Judas as a friend after his betrayal (Matthew 26:50). The rationale for this principle is that we are all sinners. Hence, judgment is a means to rehabilitate and restore, not a form of punishment. Hence, we love the person, and judge the sin or behavior.

4. Godly judgment begins with humility, recognizing the limits of human understanding, the influence of our own sins and weaknesses on our reasoning processes, and our dependence on the Holy Spirit to view the hidden truth and motives rather than an external, appearance-based focus. Godly judgment acknowledges that our personal lenses—used to evaluate others and ourselves—are flawed.
5. The judgment process begins first with “removing the log from our own eye” (Matthew 7:5). In order to assess a situation properly, we need first to assume responsibility for our own contributions to a problem or situation, and second, to identify in ourselves the presence and influence of the same issue that appears on the other person. We have a tendency to identify clearly in others the very issues we struggle with, and externalize and displace the guilt and condemnation that we repress in ourselves, projecting it onto others.
6. We need to strive to understand as much as possible the motives, life experiences, and worldviews of others. This is essential if we are to depersonalize and avoid demonizing those we must judge. Mitigating circumstances, emotional and physical wounds, and the hidden pain of others are motivating sources for much of the dysfunctional, sinful, and unethical behavior in others. In other words, wounded people wound others. The goal is not to absolve them of responsibility but to develop empathy and understanding to provide for a more nuanced response. When we “die to ourselves” and are not dependent on man for affirmation, identity, and ego development, it is much easier to speak truth and love to promote the best interests of others, as we lose our “fear of man.”
7. Approach the process of determining motivation and intent with great caution and humility. This is the rationale for standard HR disciplinary best practices of focusing attention on behavior, not personality. Servant leaders are not psychologists nor are they God, as deep transformational change requires the self-awareness and surrender of the other person and the operation of the Holy Spirit. Man judges upon appearances, only God can discern the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

8. The Bible differentiates the sins of intent and those of passion. The sins of intent are the most serious. This is reflected in that Jesus judged most severely those in leadership positions that possess a higher level of accountability, the Pharisees, the temple marketplace vendors, and the nation of Israel as a whole. The most serious form of sin requiring judgment is when those in authority know the truth but choose to promote their own self-interests. This is the same spirit as demonstrated by Satan in John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, where Satan states, "It is better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven." Hence, sins of the will are the most serious. Conversely, sins of passion are viewed with more compassion by Jesus. He never became angry toward the Romans, the tax collectors, the drunkards, the prostitutes, nor the divorced. He demonstrated love, patience, and forgiveness, judging the behavior, but offering love and hope to sinners and encouraging them to "sin no more."
9. God's judgment mirrors other key biblical principles. In the judgment process, the goal is restoration and rehabilitation, not punishment and condemnation. God's judgment offers hope and a chance of repentance. Even Judas would have been forgiven, I believe, if he would have asked Jesus for repentance.
10. Godly judgment entails the appropriate level of discipline; hence, the consequences are matched with the overall factors including:
 - a. The frequency of the behavior
 - b. Its level of severity and consequences for others
 - c. The degree of personal accountability and responsibility accepted by the person

Leadership situations that entail judgments are challenging and stressful, but our ability to make God-honoring judgments is enhanced when our goal is to love the other person, understanding that love is not a feeling of affection, but the conscious choice to promote the best interests of others, irrespective of our personal feelings toward—or experiences with—that person. When we begin in humility with prayer, asking the Lord for wisdom, guidance, and the ability to love others, we reduce our personal stress. Another key element is to identify and reduce the influence of the fear of man, either the addiction to praise and encouragement, or the avoidance of negative feedback and conflict. When we approach a situation not fearing or needing the approval of others, we are more able to love them as God designs and desires.

Application Questions

1. How comfortable are you with judging others? How successful have you been in the past?
2. What are the greatest obstacles for you in judging others in a godly fashion? How can you overcome these problems?
3. Think of a work or personal life situation that entails elements of judgment. How will you approach the situation differently?

REFLECTIONS ON JUDGMENT

We cannot presume to know the mind of God regarding the complex set of factors that determine a person's salvation. We must approach each person with humility, as none of us can assume what we would do if we were in the place of our fellow sinning brother or sister. We must balance the foundational Christian commands—to love and forgive—to provide second, third, and fourth chances, with the need to hold ourselves and others accountable, to be in the world, but not be of the world (Romans 12:2). These decisions absolutely require the collective discernment provided by the Holy Spirit. The foundation is prayer and seeking his will in a passionate, earnest manner. My standard is the heart test. Why was David a man after God's own heart? Was David not an adulterer and murderer? These are serious, and if one were unrepentant, sins that justify eternal damnation. The key is that David modeled the formula for accountability. First, confess your sin. Without confession, there is no accountability. Second, repent, which requires a 180-degree change in behavior. The third condition, frequently overlooked, is that of renouncing your sin, which means to disavow all affection toward the transgression with a passionate hatred. What determines the conferral of his forgiveness is not the type, frequency, or magnitude of the sin, as we are all sinners, but our attitude toward the sin. When combined with our command to forgive our brother, not seven times a day, but seventy-seven times (Matthew 18:22), this frees the sinner from legalism.

A crafty tool that Satan uses against both Christians and non-Christians is to drown us in self-condemnation or the prideful condemnation of others for past or present sins (like the Pharisee condemning the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14). Those who commit serious sins are not automatically “unclean” and untouchable. If they recognize their consummated acts as sinful, earnestly desire to free themselves, and are making a concerted attempt to resist and change,

they will be forgiven and are not under condemnation. We can exercise Christian mercy by loving and supporting a lost sheep and make an important contribution to a precious soul's restoration. I realize that there are practical difficulties in discussing these type of issues, given social and work norms of privacy, but given their importance, these "heart" issues are mission-related and must be addressed from a Christian accountability standpoint.

We are in the midst of a great political struggle to "normalize" behavior that is contrary to God's will and design for human physical and spiritual wellbeing. Irrespective of our beliefs regarding the proper course of action, we as Christians are in the vanguard of the struggle to promote righteousness and save our fellow human beings from the spiritual and physical destruction associated with all categories of sin. Let us uphold with a gracious and loving fervor the standards of biblical integrity without judging or condemning others. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. Are you quick to judge? What are the consequences?
2. How can you reduce your tendency to judge others?
3. What concrete steps will you take to be more patient with others?

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away (Matthew 24:14–15).

The Parable of the Talents provides profound lessons for servant leaders. The parable begins with a master endowing three servants with varying sums of money, representing their differential natural talents, gifts, and abilities. The first two are given five and two talents respectively, and they invest the money wisely, generating equal investment rates of return (at a hundred percent). The third servant decided to "bury" his single talent and return the original investment with no return. The main learning point for servant leaders is that comparison in the workplace is very destructive. The servant who hid the talent was very angry and fearful of the master for several reasons. First, he failed to understand the master's motivational system. He was angry in a comparative sense, given that other workers received greater

resources. One of the key elements of servant leadership is to communicate the importance and dignity of each position, regardless of organizational level. Second, the servant did not fully understand the expectations of the master. He did not realize that the rates of return or productivity level were normed to his ability level. He would not be unfairly assessed or rewarded. He failed to understand that there were equal magnitudes of rewards for differential ability levels. In other words, all the servants received the master's appreciation and were rewarded with greater responsibilities. Hence, the parable reinforces that we must be patient, given the differences in both our inter- and intra-ability levels. It takes time to grow, and the amount of resources invested in employees must be normed to our maturity and gift levels. This is a challenge today for many who are desirous of more rapid promotion and greater degrees of empowerment earlier in their careers. Patience is a virtue! As such, we can learn much from the Parable of the Talents.

Application Questions

1. How clearly communicated is your organization's reward system?
2. Are rewards allocated fairly in your organization? How does this influence employee comparative assessment?
3. How can you improve the reward and recognition process?

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: IN GOD'S PRESENCE

One of the great challenges to our faith is the shock, sadness, and trauma produced by tragedies such as the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings. Such terrible events present a profound challenge in trusting God in the midst of horrific pain and anger. The suffering produced by this unimaginable act of evil forever altered the lives of thirty-three families. The barbarism wreaked in the midst of the bucolic campus is a form of spiritual terrorism affronting our sense of security and justice in a loving omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God. The hard-hearted skeptics will ask, if God is real and caring, how can he permit such a tragedy? I do not want to center this devotional on the reasons why God permits evil. The traditional responses possess varying degrees of persuasiveness dependent on your underlying worldview. As Christians, we believe our fallen nature, in conjunction with free will, provides both the motive and the means to practice evil. We also believe that if we trust God with our sorrows, what was meant for evil will be transformed into good (Genesis 50:20), what the locust

has stolen will be restored (Joel 2:25), that all things work out for the best for those who love God and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28), and that for this temporary state of affliction, we have a far more eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). These are profound and comforting truths, but for those in the midst of unexpected grief and sorrow that arrives like a thief in the night, our traditional supports, even our Christian beliefs, ring hollow at times. After the media attention fades, and the initial outpouring of support dissipates and the world goes back to “normal,” the parents will continue to live in an altered reality and wonder why. Why did this happen to my child? The truth is, we will never come to an understanding in this life. We do know that an evil presence took possession of the murderer on that fateful day.

We also know that in the end, the Scripture passages quoted above will prove true. However, absolute closure is beyond the reach of mere mortals in this life. The first response to such a tragedy can only be to throw oneself at the foot of the Cross and seek the presence of God to carry us through the grieving and healing process. Only God provides the strength to cope with the moment, hence the ongoing challenge to trust him in spite of what we feel, think, or experience during those long days and nights of grief.

The other element is to recognize that only the presence of God can calm the restless search for answers and meaning in the face of life’s dreadful imponderables. This principle is illustrated by two situations involving tragedy in the Bible: the trials of Job and the Passion of our Lord during the Crucifixion. Job experienced unbearable sorrow and suffering without any rationale or explanation from God. There were many “rival hypotheses” that Job and his friends discussed, but none of them provided closure or comfort. His great temptation was to act on his anger and “curse God and die” for the deaths of his children and the destruction of his wealth and health. Thomas, one of Christ’s disciples, after another ordeal of profound suffering, asked a different set of questions regarding the reality of hope in the midst of defeat and despair—that of the resurrected Lord. Thomas relied on logic and rationality to cope with his insecurities, a very cold source of comfort when reason fails, as it always will at some point in our lives. Both Thomas and Job faced situations of such daunting and cataclysmic effect that it overwhelmed their logic and support paradigms, both human and spiritual. These situations defy human standards of logic, reason, love, and justice. In essence, they were applying human truth tests to situations that challenge our faith and heart. Each possessed preconceived notions of how they would approach God, but

each experienced the most profound reality that all human seeking and searching fails in the presence of infinite love, wisdom, and truth. It is paradoxical that the answer to all our questions in the search for meaning is reason's surrender in the presence of the Alpha and the Omega. Job and Thomas both fell on their knees in humility and understood, at the deepest heart level, that God's grace alone is sufficient. No answers are needed, only a recognition that "My Lord and My God" (John 20:28) alone repairs and restores broken hearts. My prayer is that each person who died knew the Lord, or accepted the Lord with their last breath, even the killer. Their trials and suffering are done, and my prayer for the parents, families, and friends is that they will choose forgiveness as the Amish did after the Pennsylvania shootings, and seek the only power in the universe that can provide ultimate rest, the personal presence of the living God. In heaven, we will experience the peace and rest that escapes us in the temporal realm. For this temporary state of affliction, we gain a far more eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Our hope appears in Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

Application Questions

1. How well have you coped with the tragedies in your life, large or small?
2. How would you comfort a friend experiencing a tragedy? How would it differ from how you would comfort yourself?
3. Has tragedy adversely affected your faith? If so, how has God helped you to reestablish confidence?

THE MIND AND WILL OF GOD

How can we know the will of God? How can we separate our desires from the multitude of voices in our minds? This issue is very important and foundational to our Christian faith. A finite human, by definition, is unable to grasp the full scope of God's intention, will, and purpose for our lives. The well-known Scripture passage from Isaiah 55:7–9 clearly reflects this principle:

let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your

ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

There will always be an element of the unknown relative to the mind of God for two reasons, the first being the sheer cognitive impossibility of grasping the infinite mind of God and the immensely complicated relationship between the temporal and spiritual universes, and secondly, the importance of operating by faith. Even if God fully communicated his intentions, we would be unable to understand fully his instructions and the rationale behind them. The partial and incomplete grasping of the implications would generate a paralyzing range of emotions including fear, confusion, and pride. The Kingdom principle of free will requires human beings to make decisions under varying conditions of uncertainty based upon critical analysis and reflection of our motives, means, and ends using a biblical worldview as a compass. Exercising our free moral faculties under conditions of uncertainty increases our faith in God. In most situations, we are unaware of God's exact intentions unless he makes them clear in a direct manifestation of the Holy Spirit, such as a dream, vision, or prophecy. Even then, there is much contextual detail missing to protect us from the paralyzing fear produced with detailed advance knowledge of the trials and tribulations that accompany serving God. In addition, God also desires to shelter us from pride and complacency arising from grandiose visions. God is not the author of confusion, and he does provide a sense of direction if we are making a good faith attempt to discern his presence and purpose.

The fundamental compass point is the word as stated in the Bible. The Bible provides the foundational life principles for all human conduct. The Bible is not a detailed policy manual, however, but a set of decision rules that provide us with the values and parameters for principled and God-centered decision making, as directed by the Holy Spirit. The key to understanding the Bible is not at the intellectual level only, but at the heart and spirit level. Scripture is the living and breathing word of God, and the only way that we can grasp its applicability to general and specific life situations is with guidance from the Holy Spirit. A person can intellectually read and cognitively comprehend a Bible passage, but its integration and application requires a deeper level of understanding through the inward-dwelling power of the Holy Spirit. God will never ask us to think, act, or feel in a manner contrary to the word. Always "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) by comparing the letter and spirit of the message with a balanced understanding of scripture. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews

13:8), and as he guided the children of Israel through the wilderness, he will provide a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night to guide your steps (Exodus 13:21). The only way to consistently know God's intentions is to commit to an ongoing relationship with him in which God is the center of your life. This requires the cultivation of a personal relationship, dedicated time to Bible reading, prayer, fasting, fellowship, and worship. When we ask for direction, God confirms his intentions in multiple forms (by the mouth of two or three witnesses) through the counsel of others, patterns of providential circumstances, biblical support, dreams, and most importantly, through peace in our hearts.

Application Questions

1. How clearly do you hear God's voice? What things seem to help and hurt your hearing from the Lord?
2. What steps do you need to take to hear God's voice more clearly?
3. How can you help other Christians to hear the Lord's voice more clearly?

A BEAUTIFUL MIND

As a person who struggled and wrestled with anxiety disorders (anxiety, panic, and obsessive-compulsive behavior) for many years, I can state from experience that a path to healing is to form new God-honoring neural pathways of thought through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. The challenge is to overcome the traumatic experiences and genetic predispositions that instill the flawed thinking and obsessive rumination over negative thoughts, fueling the crippling fear. A great film that illustrates this point about serious mental illness is *A Beautiful Mind*, with Russell Crowe playing the role of Princeton scientist John Nash. In this film, we are introduced to key characters that we initially believe are real but later we find are projections of his schizophrenia. A moment of epiphany occurs when he realizes that what he deemed as reality is in fact the projection of his very active and lucid imagination interacting with his mental illness. The film is brilliant in weaving in characters and situations that appear real in all regards, but in reality are products of a diseased, but beautiful, mind. He begins to take psychotropic medication, but finds the side effects intolerable. Hence, he is left with a difficult choice, take the medication but endure the powerful side effects, or live in a dangerous fantasy world in which reality and the imagination merge.

However, he did possess one advantage. The schizophrenia-induced characters of a college friend, a little girl, and a CIA chief retained the same identity and did not age over the years. Thus, he made the choice to ignore their presence and pleas to interact, regardless of their intensity, begging, and protestations. He learned to ignore the temptation to engage in dialogue and was able to move forward in life eventually winning the Nobel Prize in Economics.

This principle is powerful for others who suffer from mental illness. One of the great temptations with any sickness, disease, or disability is to assume the identity of the illness or condition. Hence, the associated limitations and dysfunctions define and limit our potential and we remain a prisoner. I have a similar situation with a constellation of actors within the inner dialogues of my mind. These characters are my recurring strongholds or demonic partners of fear, anxiety, and worry. My first colorful character “chum” is the ever-gabby harbinger of doom taking glee in his continual reminders of my death and entry into the great void of nothingness. My second friend is the chronic doubter and cynic, a busybody “friend” who questions and rejects the existence of God. The third member of this clique is my hypochondriac “buddy” who constantly reminds me of the dangers of my elevated blood pressure and the risk of heart attack and stroke. The final character of this curious quartet is my “fear of man” performance anxiety “amigo” who continually reminds me of my public speaking weaknesses and fears.

They are my regular companions, but like Dr. Nash, I have learned to respond to their nagging and pleading accusations and replacing them with the truth presented in the word of God. I have to make the choice every day not to engage in their persistent demands for attention and or in arguments or conversations that lead me down the path of fantasy, fear, and torment. I have learned as well that I cannot simply ignore or repress them, as this only makes their voices louder. If I repress one, the others will take its place like weeds pruned at the soil surface while leaving the roots. The key is to focus my attention on Scripture, pray in the spirit, and redirect my concentration by replacing the dysfunctional thoughts with God’s peace. When I do engage my “friends,” it is in the form not of argument, but the rebuttal of the lies with truth.

These characters are false prophets of doom, and the Word emboldens us to neither listen to nor fear false prophets. This battle is exhausting at times, but the rules of Romans 8:28 and God’s strength have blessed me in my weakness. Through these struggles, I have learned many important lessons of grace and comfort that I share with others.

I have seen God move on my behalf as I agree with his Word and my faith activates his power to destroy these fears behind me, as God drowned the Egyptian soldiers at the Red Sea (Exodus 14). The path of faith is not easy for those afflicted with mental illness, but God's Word is greater and his power will gradually reclaim what the locust has stolen. I pray for your strength to rest in his peace and power.

Application Questions

1. What "strange characters" haunt your inner dialogue? How persistent are those voices and how do they influence you?
2. Review the Bible to find Scripture passages that challenge and rebut the lies of your inner characters.
3. How can you help others to gain victory over their own inner voices?

CHAPTER 8



BUILDING WORKPLACES OF INTEGRITY

LEAVING THE NINETY-NINE FOR THE ONE, PART I

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost (Matthew 18:12–14).

Servant leaders are called to make difficult decisions regarding staffing and other human resource system issues. One of the key biblical principles relates to God's concern for the individual. In Matthew 18 and Luke 15, the shepherd cares deeply and passionately for each sheep. There is no question of viewing employees as resources and costs to be minimized, rationalizing the flippant sacrifice of the individual or the few for the greater good, thereby reducing human beings to cogs in a machine. God numbers the hairs on the head of each of the six billion plus human beings; hence, he knows each of his sheep intimately. We as servant leaders are called to embrace that same spirit. What does this mean for the servant leader?

First, servant leaders seek to promote the best interests of each and every employee or any other kind of stakeholder under their authority or in their path. This means that all decisions entail a formal calculus of the consequences for the wellbeing of each employee. It also means that servant leaders seek out opportunities to help and assist individual employees. How can this be accomplished? First, by modeling the practice of the ministry of interruptions. As leaders and managers, issues will come to our attention that are unplanned, and we must

make a decision as to whether to address the problem directly and in the present, or to maintain the current schedule given its greater importance. In many cases, altering the schedule is the moral and necessary response. When we demonstrate to others our willingness to abandon or alter a fixed agenda to help others with legitimate needs, it demonstrates that the leader has a shepherd's heart and genuine care for his or her employees. It reinforces the idea that we can be trusted to place human needs first, increasing relationship integrity.

The second element involves making a genuine attempt to build authentic relationships through the investment of time. With large organizations, this will entail a combination of formal and informal practices. These include the following policies:

1. Management by "walking around" on a regular basis. This can entail eating lunch in the organizational cafeteria, taking frequent walking breaks around the office, or greeting employees at the beginning of the day.
2. Holding "office hours" in which employees can visit without an appointment.
3. Holding frequent in-person and virtual town meetings in which issues are discussed openly and employees are urged to ask, and rewarded for asking, difficult or controversial questions.
4. Urging and requiring subordinates and leaders and managers to adopt the same practices.
5. Providing means for anonymous inputs, including suggestion and feedback systems by email, traditional paper, or electronic means.
6. The use of ongoing employee attitude surveys, focus groups, entrance, engagement, and exit interviews to gauge employee views, problems, and needs.
7. Linking leadership and management advancement to employees, subordinates, and 360-degree evaluations. No manager or leader should be hired or advanced with high levels of employee dissatisfaction.

The end result is the cultivation of authentic and vibrant two-way relationships that facilitate understanding of the organization's strengths and weaknesses from the employee perspective as well as a means for developing empathy for employee challenges, problems, and stressors.

The second major component is a commitment to a global analysis of the consequences of major organizational decisions on employees and other key stakeholders in general. For example, how would the introduction of a new product or service be supported adequately through training, adequate staffing, and patience regarding results to reduce employee stress? This entails proactive planning to anticipate

the pressure points from increases in employee workload and the need for training to support the development of new skills and competencies. In organizational termination decisions—for reasons of individual conduct, performance, or economic necessity—have all other avenues been explored and exhausted? Has the employee been properly counseled? With group or larger organizational layoff decisions, is the layoff essential for organizational survival and mission achievement? Are there alternative means for reducing personnel costs, such as hiring freezes, reduction in force through attrition, and shared sacrifice through pay and benefit reductions or mandatory furloughs? Does the organization value its employees more than short- or middle-term profits? A great example of this is the decision by the Kentucky State University president to reduce his salary by 25 percent in order to raise the wage level of the lowest paid employees at the university, the true commitment of a good shepherd to justice and a living wage (Cunningham, 2014).

Finally, it is important to encourage leaders and supervisors to promote servant leader practices, irrespective of the larger organizational culture. The term that I borrow from ecology is “microclimate.” A microclimate is a smaller area that possesses a significantly divergent climate from what is the norm in the area as a whole. The same element is true in organizations. Individual servant leaders can practice God-honoring principles like Joseph in the Pharaohs’ court and Daniel in Babylon. Hence, we can choose to offer an alternative vision that provides dignity, hope, and respect to your employees within an authoritarian or instrumental organization.

Application Questions

1. How consistently do you practice the ministry of interruptions? Why or why not?
2. How would you characterize your organizational climate relative to supporting employees? What are the strengths and weaknesses?
3. What improvements in your organizational practices would facilitate treating employees with greater degrees of dignity and respect?

LEAVING THE NINETY-NINE FOR THE ONE, PART II

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).

As with most scriptural teachings related to servant leadership, there are multiple levels and meanings. The prior section addressed the implications of Matthew 18:12–14—as we leave the “ninety-nine for the one” for our employees in the decision-making process—while

this section addresses our inner thought world from a different perspective. Psychology and biblical teachings agree on a very important principle: humans are predisposed to viewing both their inner and outer worlds with a negative tinge, but for different reasons (Baumeister et al., 2001). In science, it is assumed that our propensity to focus on the negative is an evolutionary survival instinct. In order to avoid predators and other forms of danger that result in injury or loss of life, we have learned to focus more of our sensory and thought processes on recognizing the stimuli and situations associated with threats to our existence. Hence we are hard-wired to assign more salience and importance to negative thoughts and situations. In other words, we leave the ninety-nine good thoughts to focus on the one negative that may cause our demise. However, those thought patterns that are functional in a hunting and gathering society have less relevance and utility in our modern world. Hence we often make “mountains out of molehills,” exaggerating the danger.

From a biblical standpoint, the Fall of Man introduces sin, increasing the power and influence of the devil and his demons on our thought processes. Hence, we are encouraged to channel our focus on the negative—predisposing us to fear, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and despair. In essence, we remove our eyes from God, thus focusing on the problem and increasing its size and importance. Hence, our faith is reduced, generating self-fulfilling prophecies of despair that make circumstances and the Goliaths of fear larger than God, which in turn generates adverse effects on our mental, physical, and spiritual health. As it states in Proverbs, 17:22, “A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.”

Hence, one of the most important servant leader job elements is to cultivate a culture of faith, hope, and love—the antidote to our natural proclivity to focus and dwell on the negative. In essence, servant leaders must first manage their own inner worlds to reduce their personal stress so they in turn can reduce the stress of others. How does this translate into concrete behaviors? One element is to recognize the human tendency to place more weight on negative feedback. Studies of work groups demonstrate that the most effective groups have a balance of negative and positive feedback, but not at an equal ratio. We do obviously require negative feedback and negative emotional states to promote learning, for error correction, and to anticipate realistic threats, but within boundaries. The estimated ratio of positive to negative comments is approximately 5.6 to 1 (Zenger & Folkman, 2013). Hence, servant leaders recognize the necessity for loving discipline, but also promote an overall climate of hope, faith, and encouragement

that ensures that threats are realistically identified and addressed without excessive fear and anxiety.

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your general orientation regarding a positive or negative mindset?
2. What steps can you take to improve your ability to promote a healthy emotional workplace?
3. What aspects of Scripture help us to view situations from a hopeful but realistic perspective?

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts,
but profuse are the kisses of an enemy (Proverbs 27:6).

As servant leaders, we must learn how to provide feedback of all types: positive, negative, and neutral. The enemies of accurate feedback are many, but the foundation is fear in its various forms. Effective feedback begins with the orientation of our hearts. When we are grounded in the Lord and led by the Holy Spirit, our underlying motive in providing feedback is love to facilitate character and performance excellence. The goal is to develop a healthy interpersonal relationship that promotes mutual trust and credibility. Ideally, we are providing ongoing performance feedback that is clear, specific, timely, and focused on changing behavior, not personality. It is important to receive training on how to provide negative feedback, but this is only half of the relationship. Just as we need to be cheerful givers, we need to learn how to be cheerful receivers. What does this entail?

Traditional feedback communication training focuses mostly on the transmission process. However, we do not normally emphasize the role of the receiver. Conversely, when our hearts are guided by the Holy Spirit, we are teachable and humble, recognizing our need for corrective feedback, irrespective of the source. This is even more challenging for leaders, given the pride and reputation factor. However, as Christians, we need to understand that we may be speaking to angels unaware, and that everyone—from the janitor to the CEO, from the smallest to the most important client or customer—provides important information. Hence, to be a “cheerful receiver,” we must suspend our pride and openly receive feedback from friend or foe. This does not mean we accept information

in a gullible fashion. We, of course, test the spirits with the wisdom of God, the teaching of Scripture, and the wisdom of other counselors, but we are open to learning. As we mentioned previously, the enemy of the feedback process is fear of man, in one form or another. When we as a receiver or a giver equate our self-worth to our performance and the approval of others, we are vulnerable to being controlled by the circumstances and the reactions of others. We will vacillate between the addictive need for affirmation as a validator of self-image forged through performance and the fear of losing the approval of others through telling the truth. In addition, when we are insecure and possess low self-esteem, negative feedback is even more toxic, given that it becomes a validation of our greatest fear; hence it is either repressed or avoided. Therefore, when we react through incredulity or temper tantrums to negative feedback, it is a prime indicator that we believe the lies of our haunted conscience that we are “no good” and not worthy.

Hence, it is important to ask the Holy Spirit for the wisdom and courage to receive feedback in the proper spirit. For those who have been wounded deeply, this will be a painful but liberating process. It will require time, patience, and often the assistance of formal counseling, but the fruit is sweet. From a formal organizational standpoint, we need to receive training in both how to give feedback and how to listen before we respond (Schawbel, 2014). The preferred approach is to embrace active listening to promote understanding first. Active listening is the practice of mindfulness and another form of love. We need to be present in more than body, and of course we are being conditioned by the ongoing information technology revolution and the increasing pace and demands of life to multi-task, reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of listening. Studies clearly show that linear focus remains the most effective approach (Buser & Peter, 2012). In active listening, we listen with all of our senses, focusing on the tone, body language, spirit, and the content of the message. We reject the temptation to defensiveness by pre-judging or formulating a response in our minds as the other person speaks. We probe and paraphrase for further understanding.

Active listening is necessary, but not sufficient. We must also be willing to receive feedback from all sources. This is the greatest challenge. Do we possess the courage, patience, and trust to receive feedback without defensiveness and discounting the source or its credibility? The goal is to attach credibility to all sources of feedback and examine their applicability, so as to separate the “wheat from the

chaff.” The goal is to develop confidence and security in our identity in Christ and not to define ourselves from the nature of the feedback. Hence we learn to separate ourselves and our worth from the content of the communication. If we fail at a project, we are not failures, but on a learning journey, secure in the knowledge that to live and grow is not a linear process of continual success.

If organizations would select and train employees regarding their ability to receive feedback, we would also promote a more loving, problem-solving, learning, and growth-oriented culture. It would facilitate performance management and team cohesiveness for both supervisor and employee. It would reduce the effect of the “fear of man,” attenuating the defensiveness of recipients. Hence, we will be able to bring a higher degree of truth into our relationships.

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your own degree of skill in receiving feedback?
2. What internal obstacles impede your ability to effectively receive negative feedback?
3. What specific action steps can you take to facilitate more effective receiving in yourself and the organization as a whole?

REFLECTIONS ON MARGIN

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:1–5).

As John 15 so eloquently portrays, unless we are connected to the vine, our walk with the Lord becomes unfruitful. Life margin is the intentional cultivation of a God-honoring lifestyle that embraces balance among the key life domains—God, family, work, church, community, rest, and recreation—under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The workplace is an important battleground for spiritual warfare, in which Satan and God compete for our heart. Below are key principles for remaining “connected to the vine.”

- *As my spiritual mentors emphasize, our natural gifts and inclinations to minister and help others in the workplace can be counterproductive when not guided by the Lord, and to minister effectively, we require obedience and life margin.* What is life margin? Life margin is the integration of God-directed boundaries and priorities to minimize excessive levels of activity, thereby simplifying our life. Life margin produces adequate time for the key life domains by including God first, followed by family and self-care. Hence, it is a life of harmony and unhurried activity and blocks of open time. Without life margin, we would minister based upon our gifts, but out of our own efforts and not in an “authorized” fashion. We must be quick to listen (hear God’s word through prayer) and slow to speak (and act). There are instances when we offer direct support and, at other times, we only offer prayer and allow the Lord to work in the person’s life. Only God gives the increase. When we are the “savior” based upon our gifts alone, we, not God, receive the glory. We are exponentially more effective when we combine God’s perfect power and wisdom with our gifts. The only way that we can avoid rash judgment and action based upon our particular gifts and nature—and the paralysis of procrastination and doubt—is to be yoked to the Lord’s spirit, and this requires margin, peace, and rest so we can spend time with the Lord.
- *We are frequently our own worst enemy when it comes to margin.* Our drive to succeed at almost any price causes us to lose margin as we attempt to achieve goals that we falsely believe to equate with success. Our challenge is to recalibrate our standards of excellence, with the goals and ends pursued according to God’s metrics. As Richard Swenson reinforces in his excellent book *Margin* (2004), in God’s economy, success is measured in loving relationships. Satan will use the temptation of accomplishments and recognition to distract each of us from our true mission and purpose. The pride of performance is like a drug that manifests diminishing returns, thereby increasing our craving for more attention and recognition. Clearly the answer is to rest in the grace of God and receive his instructions that define the true “best” elements.
- *We must make time for the simple, but profoundly important elements that are the heartbeat of God, which is time spent in loving God and others.* Modern life presents the continual temptation to substitute activity over being by the need to prove our spiritual mettle through works. The key factor is to ask the Lord to identify the root motive for whatever we do. We must rest in the spirit of grace if our motives are to flow from God’s perfect will. The real challenge is to separate

the best from the good. We must set God-honoring boundaries to cultivate margin and the energy to truly love others. Keep the Sabbath and avoid a church “overload” mentality of endless meetings and events on Sunday.

- *Many Christians are enslaving their lives to the “god of mammon” blinded by the allure of power, wealth, and material comforts over relationships.* No one on their deathbed regrets not making more money; it is the deep pain of lost time and relationships that troubles the soul. Let us commit to place our hearts and minds on the things of God. Only the blood of Jesus provides the solution.
- *Busyness disconnects us from the vine and the life-giving presence and voice of the Holy Spirit. A hectic level of activity promotes legalism, a spirit of works, and a spirit of pride, as we are unable to discern the best from the good.* The challenge for each one of us is to build godly margin so we can engage in a vital two-way relationship. Our frenetic activity level leaves us vulnerable to compassion fatigue, discouragement, and an absence of joy. We become vulnerable to all forms of temptation, given that we are not walking closely with our first love. Is the root cause of our malady the amount of time, or is it something else? We will never gain more time than God has provided us, so is it a question of being more efficient and effective, or is it a question of priorities? In reality, it is a little of both, but our priorities determine where our heart is, and we must all pay a price to follow the path of righteousness. We use the wrong standards—and measuring stick—to assess success. Godly success occurs through the ongoing work of sanctification and Christian character development as we learn to live, work, and play like Christ. It is a pernicious lie that success and peace comes from things, not the Creator.
- *Working mothers have great challenges in this area, and the key is to avoid labeling family member “wants” and luxuries as necessities, forcing women to become “super moms.”* Our journey in life takes many circuitous paths, and one of the burdens we add is assuming an inordinate degree of responsibility for our family success and safety, especially for single-parent families. Being from a broken home myself, I understand the pain and the fear. We must focus on the essentials as directed by God. Given the inherent stresses and burdens of spiritual warfare that single parenting creates, the single parent’s level of margin is narrower than a fully intact family. This requires an even more enhanced prioritization process.
- *The absence of margin can assume the role of a spiritual stronghold and a generational curse.* God provides the means to deliver us from

generational sins if we confess, repent, and renounce our sins and first seek the Kingdom of God. Breaking the yokes of oppression includes remedying the absence of margin and simplicity. We must be available for our children. The family is ground zero in spiritual warfare. The wounds inflicted on children are designed to imprison and yoke them with lifetime burdens and to promote sinful and dysfunctional means to meeting needs.

- *Professors and students are very competitive in spirit, and we do not like to lose.* However, Satan will attempt to corrupt that desirable quality either by inflating the importance of the ends so illegitimate means are employed, or to deceive us regarding the moral integrity of the ends.
- *We must separate the best from the good through ongoing communion with the Lord.* One of the great temptations that we must face is to add on tasks and duties that are not mandated by the Lord. If we sweep our house clean and do not keep it filled with the Holy Spirit, we will continue to add more clutter.
- *God frequently brings us to the end of our personal resources to snap us out of our lethargy and spirit of self-sufficiency. Our lenses are distorted by the absence of godly vision.* When we operate under our own power and authority, we alternate between pride and fear, impatience and procrastination. I understand how frustrating and painful such a time of overload represents (both in a physical and emotional setting), but this weapon that the enemy forms against you will not prosper. I pray for the liberating presence of the Holy Spirit to guide your steps as you “right-size.”
- *Our role is to obey God and perform to the best of our abilities, to do an honest day’s work, and be content with our wages.* God is responsible for the outcome and the fruit. If we take responsibility for success and failure, we are implicitly assuming control over the outcome, promoting a prideful attitude.
- *Margin entails the ongoing practice of spiritual disciplines.* To pray continually means that we are mindful and God communicates with us in our everyday activities. When we dedicate our everyday activities to the Lord, they become a sacred prayer and hymn of worship. To meditate on the Word is important, as quantity is not nearly as important as heart-based reflection.
- *We must be wary and mindful of legalism and the fiery darts of the enemy as he attempts to use guilt as a weapon.* Fear of man and fear of the unknown cause us to stay in calm waters and bury our talents. The spirit of fear is reflected in all humans. The spirit of fear is born from our tendency to trust people and ourselves more than God.

In essence, our works and legalism say that other people have what I need instead of the Lord. I am still learning this point on a personal level. An excellent book in this area is by Ed Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small* (1997). The spirit of works and legalism is fear of man—both external, and an internal fear of our own self-mediated judgment, condemnation, and shame when we fail to meet the internalized performance standards of the world. Thank the Lord that he is the source of our strength and victory. Will we choose to rest in God and cease from our own labors, or will we blaze our own trail? When we are working with and for God, we move at a slower pace but get much more accomplished. It requires an ongoing dying to the self, a high trust in God, and an ability to rest in his grace.

- *Humility is not self-deprecation, but humbly and joyfully expressing gratitude to God for how he made us.* We are all fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and there are things that only we as individuals can do. The key is to not compare ourselves to others as that makes us vulnerable to pride, envy, fear, and complacency.

May the Lord provide his ongoing blessings of guidance as he provides greater levels of margin-based grace.

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your present level of margin in your life?
2. How does the presence or absence of margin influence the quality of your life?
3. What specific steps can you take to increase your level of margin?

CHAPTER 9



OVERCOMING LIFE OBSTACLES

EXCELLING IN THE ART OF GIVING: RISING ABOVE CIRCUMSTANCES

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy (Psalm 126:5, KJV).

Have you ever felt like your life as a servant leader is like a small ship being tossed to and fro by the wind and waves? When we are circumstance-focused as a Christian, the inevitable result is a “sea sickness” of mind, body, and spirit. A major element of our growth in Christ is keeping our mind and heart focused on Jesus in the midst of the trials, tribulations, and storms of life. As human beings in the flesh, we are all naturally circumstance driven. In other words, we evaluate our situation based upon our reasoning and the evidence of our senses. This “walking by sight” isolates us from God’s power. Many Christians say to God, “First change my circumstances and calm the storm, and then I will believe or obey.”

We please God greatly as we exercise faith irrespective of the evidence of the senses and the conclusions of the rational mind. We must employ a higher decision rule of spiritual reason in which we choose to believe God and his promises of protection, provision, and deliverance unconditionally. When we act on faith and endure, God provides the strength to persevere and the Holy Spirit writes great truths of Christian servant leader character onto our heart. These transformational truths endow us with the ability to endure the most challenging trials through Christ, who strengthens us. The pain and suffering better prepares us for future tests and greater Kingdom service and provides “markers” of his love and encouragement when we successfully endure.

One of the greatest sources of temptation relates to faith in restoration of our finances. Many of us are in the midst of the financial storm, but it is important that we view this as an opportunity to grow in faith by sowing seeds in our “tears.” A vitally important indicator of our spiritual maturity is the ability to transcend our circumstances, bless, and help others in the midst of our personal trials. From a godly perspective, it is not how much we give, but the orientation of our hearts by giving our best as an offering to God. The apostle Paul calls for us to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7) from the financial resources that we have, whether \$10 or \$10,000. Our offerings when given in love are powerful statements of faith that God will use to complete the mission and multiply the “fishes and loaves.” When we give when we are in pain, it is a powerful demonstration of our faith and trust in God who will never leave or forsake us or allow his children to beg for bread. Sow in tears, reap in joy!

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your degree of faith in God’s provision when it comes to your finances?
2. Do you believe that God desires that you prosper financially? Why or why not?
3. How can you help others gain faith in God’s provision related to finances?

SPIRITUAL ALTITUDE

What is your spiritual altitude? One of the great temptations as Christians is to engage in prideful comparative assessments of the character and worthiness of others. God calls on us not to judge (Matthew 7:1), and the reason is very clear. Humans assess appearances, while only God judges the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). In essence, our standards and lenses are faulty and biased. An analogy that the Lord provided me relates to the concept of “spiritual altitude.” Each of us operates at our unique spiritual level imperceptible by human senses. The person next to you who looks perfectly healthy in appearance may be weighed down with heavy burdens, no rest, and very little spiritual food! They may be suffering from altitude sickness operating at 20,000 feet where the air is thin while you are operating at full capacity at sea level. Only the Lord can evaluate and weigh all of these factors.

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your present spiritual altitude?
2. What factors are contributing to your challenges?
3. How can you help others change their spiritual altitude?

RIISING ABOVE CIRCUMSTANCES

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord (James 1:5–8).

God will fulfill our true needs (not our wants) at just the right time (not on our time schedule) perfecting patience in our character. A vitally important indicator of our ability to transcend our circumstances is the ability to bless and help others in the midst of our personal trials. My wife's bout with breast cancer personally illustrated this principle in a highly challenging and painful fashion. Satan attacks our weak points to instill doubt, fear, and confusion in order to impede our ability to serve as a godly source of support in times of need. The timing of these assaults is never accidental. My weak point and "thorn in the flesh" that Satan uses is the "ghost" of my legacy of atheism and agnosticism. I am prone to periodic obsessive wrestling with the question "Is God and my faith real?" The result is distraction, and self-obsessive rumination that creates a two-front war that saps precious energy from the critical role of spiritual intercessor and supporter. I have learned over the years to wait patiently and trust in God as I weather the storm. God *always* responds by gently answering the questions while providing pearls of spiritual truth that increase my faith and understanding in his grace and mercy, and this situation was no different.

One of Joyce Meyers' sermons provided the foundation for God's direct intercession by making the point that one of the great spiritual warfare tools is to rise above the circumstances by helping others in the midst of your personal storms. It is like heaping hot coals of fire on the enemy (Proverbs 25:22) when we continue to love and assist others even though we are hurting. Hence, rising above circumstances is another form of dying to the self, of rebutting the inherent narcissism that it is all about "me." It rebuts the perfectionist lie that I must be in perfect peace or that all of my sins and problems must be

addressed before I can help others. If that was the case, God could use not a single human. I do not have to be “perfect” in order to love others, speak into their lives, and release the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Rising above circumstances is a tangible demonstration of agape love and our humility and faith in the Lord that numbers the hairs on our head. So rise above the storm, and be lifted on the wings of eagles by practicing the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart, mind, body, and spirit, and our neighbor as ourselves, whether we are in the valley or on the mountaintop!

Application Questions

1. What strategies do you employ to resist discouragement in troubling circumstances?
2. How is your decision-making influenced by “emotional reasoning” related to challenging circumstances? How can you resist the influence of emotional reasoning?
3. What are the most effective means for encouraging others to resist control by circumstances?

AVOIDING DISCOURAGEMENT

He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done (Matthew 26:42, KJV).

As Christian servant leaders, it is critical to reflect on the Passion of Jesus in relation to the joyous good news of the resurrection. In order for us to experience the resurrection power of Christ, we must walk through the dark valleys when God’s presence seems distant or nonexistent. It is precisely at these times that God stretches and perfects our faith. Paraphrasing the great nineteenth-century evangelist Smith Wigglesworth, it is not what we feel or think that matters, only what we believe! This is a very comforting, but challenging concept.

Jesus learned obedience by trusting God’s purpose and plan for his life in spite of his dire circumstances and the powerful human emotions that created potent sources of temptation. This testing began with his forty-day temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11) in which Satan used Jesus’ physical weakness as the lure to avoid short-term pain, and gain power and wealth without an equivalent investment of agonizing obedience. A second great example is his anguish in the

Garden of Gethsemane in which he fervently prayed to “remove this cup from me” (Luke 22:42) but surrendered to the will of the Father by stating, “Not my will but yours be done.” Finally, the greatest example was on the Cross of Calvary and his separation from God when he bore the sins of humanity, thereby paving the way for salvation.

We cannot mature in Christ until we are able to trust the Word in spite of the logic of the intellect, self-interested cost-benefit calculations, the influence of emotional reasoning, and the vagaries of changing circumstances. When the “bottom-line,” external circumstances, or inner emotions rule our decisions, this powerful form of slavery make us “double-minded and unstable in our ways.” In our personal trials, it is critical to recall both the principles and specific examples of divine protection in Scripture and to remember our personal experiences of God’s providential intervention to resist discouragement. That is why the Lord encourages us to remember our past deliverances and make “markers” to commemorate the event (Genesis 28:18).

I receive great comfort in Scripture and from recalling my experiences of the bountiful fruit produced by trusting God during the dry times. A clear illustration of this principle occurred in a conversation with my accountability partner during a very difficult season in which God’s presence seemed distant or nonexistent. We discussed our mutual challenges in trusting God when his presence seems to flee from us. He later noted that he perceived the Holy Spirit during our talk even though I was not experiencing God’s personal presence in a direct sensory fashion. God remains within our heart, and the Holy Spirit communicates God’s presence in us *to* others even if we are unaware. God will then use the other person to encourage us in this wonderful feedback loop of Holy Spirit to human heart/mind communication. We are vessels through which God uses our gifts and abilities to promote his perfect will.

We must resist the temptation to conclude falsely that, when we “feel” isolated from God, his witness and power through us are neutralized. It reminds me of evangelist Reinhardt Bonnke. He was asked if he always feels the presence of the Holy Spirit and his reply was an emphatic “no.” He, like all Christians, experienced those “dry” times, but when they arrive, he “appropriates” the power of the Holy Spirit through faith. In our insecurity and narcissism, we make the mistake of equating emotion with substance, thereby increasing our susceptibility to acting on temptation, thereby choosing discouragement and despair over faith. The result is that we impede the work of the Holy Spirit by believing the prideful lie that God can only work in us when we perceive him consciously. Satan does this to steal our confidence

and generate discouragement to weaken our motivation with the goal of spoiling our fruits, invalidating the power of our witness, and impeding our purpose in Christ. Let us choose to believe the good news of Christ and embrace faith over discouragement.

Application Questions

1. How do your emotions “sabotage” your faith? How can you resist being controlled by your emotions?
2. What are the great challenges that you face in obeying the Lord? How can they be overcome?
3. Are you able to move forward even when God’s presence is distant or seems nonexistent? If yes, what strategies or approaches are useful? If not, how can you overcome the obstacles?

THE GIFT OF SUFFERING

A very difficult principle for most Christians to accept is that God uses our suffering to bless and encourage others. We must be very careful to resist the adoption of a spiritually narcissistic gospel that assumes that we are only within the will of God when we are in good health and prosperity. Clearly, trials, tribulations, and suffering will come in many forms and sources, some caused by our own sins, others as a result of spiritual warfare attacks for following righteousness (for example, Job). Disease, injury, suffering, and death, all products of Adam’s free will original sin, were never God’s will for humanity. Suffering is a consequence of a fallen world and humanity’s freedom to choose good or evil, a foundational attribute for experiencing and expressing love. The spiritual principles underlying the universe mirror the natural laws, and God restored cosmic balance through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. In God’s economy, nothing done for the Lord is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58) as he transforms what was meant for evil into good (Genesis 50:20). Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), hence we are stewards, not owners of what God has created in us.

Our suffering is of benefit to others in several ways. The first is our good example of patience and perseverance through pain and trials (Romans 5:3). A great example is Job, who in the face of crushing sorrow, held fast to his faith in God (Job 1:20–22). By trusting God, we demonstrate to others that God’s promise of comfort, protection, and victory is greater than the evils of this world (1 John 4:4). In the words of the apostle Paul, “For this slight momentary affliction is

preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.” (2 Corinthians 4:17) Second, when we are hurting, we provide opportunities for others to exercise compassion, increase their faith, demonstrate mercy, and offer encouragement (Luke 10:33–35).

We are blessed when we act as our brother’s keeper, hence, when we suffer, it provides opportunities for others to receive spiritual blessings (it is better to give than to receive). The result is that both parties are able to withdraw attention from the self (Matthew 16:25), the sufferer by offering their sickness as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), and the helper by giving of their time, prayers, and support. God ministers to us powerfully when we are serving others. Even our deaths can be a catalyst to focus God’s love and presence, as the family surrounds the dying and his Holy Spirit brings peace, healing, and a sense of reassurance regarding the final destination of our loved ones (Hebrews 11:1). It can be an opportunity for others to reevaluate their relationship with God based upon the certainty of death and the vanity of worldly goals and pursuits (Romans 6:16), thereby serving as a catalyst to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior to fill the gap in our hearts and souls (Romans 5:17).

Application Questions

1. What is your personal view on suffering?
2. How will you or have you coped with suffering?
3. If you could ask God why he allows suffering, what do you think he would say?

PATIENCE IN THE VALLEY

He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence (1 Kings 19:10–12).

One of the most difficult fruits of the spirit to develop in achievement-oriented managers and employees is that of resting in God and

waiting patiently for him in the midst of trials and tribulations that quench joy in our workplace ministry. In the midst of the valleys of our lives, it is quite common for God to withdraw his discernible presence, his inner voice, and to extinguish the satisfaction we receive from accomplishing the good works that define our gifts and passions. Why does God remove his presence and favor?

Our “trials by fire” reveal what is in our hearts in order to strengthen our character in preparation for our next season of service. Our orientation is to assume that there is something amiss when we are not hearing God’s voice clearly or “feeling” our accustomed emotional returns, and our works-based nature tempts us to premature action to solve the problem. This mistaken assumption diverts our attention and reduces our ability to detect God’s voice speaking to us in unexpected ways. New wine and wineskins frequently entail different forms of communication and novel sources of motivation to more fully equip us for the challenges of the season. Satan understands this strategy, and if the devil cannot steal our salvation, he will try to steal our peace by implanting noise and confusion in our inner spiritual ears to block God’s message. If we cannot hear the Lord, we cannot obey his calling!

Hearing God at this time requires that we spend more quiet time in his presence, to cease from our own labors, a strategy that conflicts with the “action”-oriented nature. When God is extinguishing our past sources of satisfaction, he is doing this to get our attention and to motivate us to look at other aspects of a larger picture, to provide a more mature, nuanced, and blessed understanding of our mission and ministry. Without the diminishment of satisfaction, we are tempted to remain in the “comfort zone,” impeding God’s will for our lives. In order for us to move from glory to glory, there is a time of discord and trial that refines and purifies. When we do not understand these concepts, we are more likely to lean on our own understanding and engage in a form of self-serving rebellion.

We need to surrender to the new things and to avoid the example of Elijah who was so busy with the ministry objectives of fighting the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) that he failed to practice humility by seeking the Lord’s guidance and reassurance that he was not alone (1 Kings 19). In essence, he was partially operating out of his own strength and not relying on the life-giving vine. His absence of active spiritual listening temporarily impeded the next level of ministry through his mistaken belief in his isolation, contributing to his depression and fear after his confrontation on Mount Carmel exhausted his physical and spiritual reserves.

One of the most powerful lessons is practicing humility and allowing God to work quietly in us through our life trials. In our vanity, we are always looking and hoping for God to speak to us in a dramatic fashion as with the tornado, earthquake, and volcano, as noted in 1 Kings 19 at the beginning of the devotional, but in most cases he speaks in the small, still voice of our own mind and conscience. The only way we can hear in whispers is to reduce our activity level and wait for him. I am in the midst of such a time, and it is a very difficult process. For example, the Lord reduced the joy and satisfaction I received from my teaching duties and my ministry goals of developing a program in workplace spiritual intelligence right before a major change in my life. I became interim dean of our school, thereby reducing work effort in those two areas. However, now that I have returned to the faculty, I possess a much greater appreciation for the classroom and a renewed sense of enthusiasm and purpose. It is important to receive guidance from the Lord as to whether a change is temporary or constitutes a long-term shift in focus. I believe it is a temporary change in direction, but the only God-honoring response is to humble oneself and seek his presence. This is very challenging in the midst of my busy schedule, but there are no shortcuts. We have the blessed assurance that whatever God plans, it is always for our betterment, and whatever needs discarding, God replaces with something even more precious. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. How clearly are you able to hear God's voice in making life transitions?
2. Provide an example in which you did not hear clearly from the Lord or failed to obey his counsel. What were the consequences and what did you learn?
3. How does the Lord normally communicate with you?

CHAPTER 10



PRIDE

ANGER TOWARD GOD

Then his wife said to him, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die” (Job 2:9).

One of the great classics of English literature that speaks volumes on key spiritual issues is John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*. The central figure is Satan and Milton’s artful poetic prose develops key aspects of Satan’s character. One classic line captures the essence of the spirit of rebellion that is the foundation of the original sin of pride. Satan states that it is “better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven.” As an ex-atheist and agnostic who tasted the intoxicating but ultimately bitter wine of rebellion against God, I understand this spirit well. Whatever the source of our wanderings from God, the spirit of the anti-Christ usurps God’s rightful place and replaces godly standards of accountability and purpose with our own. In essence, Satan is saying that we can do a better job than God of ruling our own life, and by extension, running the universe; when we embrace other worldview masters, we endorse this. I hear many atheists complain that there cannot be a God, as no rational or loving God would make a world so rife with contradictions and pain. My reply to this line of reasoning is to thank God that we are not controlling the universe, as our standards would result in an even greater level of insanity and evil than the present world order. Evil and suffering were never part of God’s plan, as he voluntarily limited himself and delegated to us the freedom to choose good or evil in charting our own course and destiny. God’s plan for humanity will prevail as victory is certain, but we

have the freedom to choose life and death in the interim with many causalities and lost battles for souls.

This latent anger toward God resurfaced intermittently over the last six years in a more muted, but troubling form. One of the realities of spiritual warfare is that our minds are an “open field” battleground between three powers: our own fleshly will, the Holy Spirit and angelic realm, and Satan and the demonic. All three voices compete for our attention, and we must choose whom we will serve. At first I was puzzled by the return of angry feelings and the cursing thoughts (literally) of God, and then I became increasingly frustrated by this. This anger seemed to rise up mysteriously, but based upon prayer and the Lord’s intervention, the cause is clearer. One of the great benefits of reviewing the teachings of the Early Church is in reinforcing the use of spiritual warfare tactics by the enemy and remembering their solution. As Solomon noted, there is nothing new under the sun. The early fathers described how pious men of the Lord are afflicted by the most vile and blasphemous thoughts against their will (Climacus, 1982; Coniaris, 1998). In some cases a sin or weakness provided the opening, in other cases, Satan was simply implanting thoughts. This knowledge alone was a huge relief. This rebutted the lie of the enemy that these thoughts reflected my dire spiritual state and a solitary darkness of heart shared by no one else. The early church fathers understood that if these blasphemous thoughts occur in your mind, but you do not desire to speak them aloud, they are not of your heart and will, but are demonic in origin (Climacus, 1982; Coniaris, 1998).

However, I do bear responsibility for their foundation as a dark fruit of my rebellion and rejection of God as a teenager. My uprising gave the devil an opening to implant the blasphemous thoughts, which I initially embraced and ruminated upon repeatedly. I did not understand that I was wrestling with obsessive and compulsive thoughts, a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder, an inherited mental illness. However, I did experience inner conflict and guilt when they surfaced, as I knew in my heart that these thoughts were an affront to decency and goodness, in spite of my intellectual atheism. As Shakespeare noted in *Hamlet*, my strong emotions indicated an underlying guilt, hence I did “protest too much.” Satan’s tactic is to create such shame, guilt, and condemnation in our hearts so that we lose our peace in the Lord and embrace worldly sorrow. We may even falsely believe the lie that we have lost our salvation.

Our past sins provide spiritual pathways for present and future temptation. Hence, Satan is using the thoughts of the past to see if my house is “empty and swept clean,” as portrayed in Matthew 12:43–45.

The key is to confess your temptation-inducing thoughts with a mature Christian confessor, and reply to Satan as Jesus did in Luke 4:8 when he said, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

In conclusion, when we experience suffering, the omnipresent temptation is to blame God and to substitute our standards for his. As Job faced the challenge of trusting God in the midst of his sorrow, he had to resist his wife’s call to curse God and die. I thank the Lord that he is faithful when we are faithless, and that no one can pluck us out of his hand. The Lord is slowly pulling out deeply buried splinters, and I realize that the anger reflects another sensitive area for crucifixion and repentance for the healing power of Christ to complete a work of grace and restoration. Thank the Lord that I am not running the universe, as it would be a much darker place. To God be the Glory!

Application Questions

1. Have you ever had angry, blasphemous, and dark thoughts toward God? If so, how did they affect your mental state and behavior?
2. What life situations have triggered your anger toward God? How can you improve your response and coping mechanisms to the problems?
3. How would you help another person who is struggling with blasphemous thoughts?

THE SPIRIT OF REBELLION

For rebellion is no less a sin than divination, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king (1 Samuel 15:23).

Rebellion is the original sin produced by the spirit of pride. Satan’s fall from heaven was a direct result of rejecting God’s authority and the explicit substitution of self-will and personal autonomy over obedience and submission. When we as Christian servant leaders know the truth and God’s will and yet we choose not to honor and obey God, whether consciously or unconsciously, we are committing the sin of rebellion. Christ and epistle writers such as Paul and James clearly state we must be both hearers and doers of the law. The passages from 1 Samuel 15:23 reflects Saul’s fall from grace and favor due to his explicit disobedience to God’s instructions.

When we think of rebellion in biblical terms, it is natural to focus on such clear-cut examples as Israel's ongoing disobedience and rejection of God that resulted in the Israelites spending forty years in the wilderness and the eventual destruction of the nation. For mature Christians, explicit rebellion to God's commands usually takes more subtle, but insidious forms. I would like to illustrate this principle through the common emotional states of doubt and fear. The Bible clearly addresses both issues in the Old and New Testaments in a variety of forms and situations. These interconnected negative emotions are ubiquitous to fallen human nature, and are all elements of spiritual warfare that promote and inhibit our sanctification walk. Let us begin by discussing several foundational principles.

First, there is no condemnation for experiencing fear and doubt. Jesus was tempted in all ways as we were, and yet was without sin. Fear and doubt are inevitable emotional states, given our human nature. In effect, the experience of fear and doubt is a form of temptation that only becomes sin when we act upon the foundational compulsion. This reflects the principle that fear and doubt are not nouns, but verbs, entailing action and not mere intellectual assent (belief) or the experience of an emotional state. This principle is clearly illustrated in Numbers 13 and 14, when ten of the twelve scouts sent to explore the Promised Land acted upon their fear and advised the assembly not to attack the Canaanites by focusing on the "giants" of circumstances and using human reasoning, thus rejecting God's promise of protection and victory. Only Caleb and Joshua rejected the temptation to act on fear, and the Lord rewarded their courage with entry into the Promised Land while all those who rebelled died in the wilderness. In essence, when we act on fear and doubt, we engage in rebellion by rejecting God's multiple promises of protection and ultimate victory, irrespective of the circumstances. A sampling of these promises is amazing in its scope.

1. Jesus is with us always (Matthew 28:20).
2. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure (2 Corinthians 4:17).
3. God will never leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).
4. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).
5. God will not test nor tempt us beyond our ability to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).
6. That no weapon formed against us shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17).
7. God will turn what was meant for evil into a good (Genesis 50:20).

The even greater good news is that God's grace and forgiveness extend to those who engage in rebellion. God even forgave the rebellious children of Israel for acting on fear, but with serious consequences because they failed to truly repent. This leads to a second principle, that when we rebel, God extends forgiveness and grace to those who confess their sin, repent of it, and renounce their allegiance to self-will. The two great examples of this are the difference in outcome between Saul's and David's serious transgressions in the Old Testament and Peter's and Judas' in the New Testament. Saul and Judas acted on fear and embraced worldly sorrow by failing to take responsibility for their sins and engaging in another form of rebellion by refusing to humble themselves and accept God's discipline, forgiveness, and grace. They rebelled by failing to trust God for forgiveness and restoration. Worldly sorrow leads to death, while godly sorrow makes us receptive to godly discipline and promotes character development.

Both David and Peter learned from their mistakes, enhancing the breadth and scope of their respective ministries. There is no condemnation, even for acted upon fear and doubt, when we humble ourselves at the foot of the cross. We all engage in many disguised episodes of rebellion by acting on fear and doubt, but once we identify the root sin, we are one step closer to a great victory that has the power to remove yokes and break strongholds. When we repress or deny that acted-on doubt and fear is a sin, consciously or unconsciously, we give Satan permission to torment and condemn us. For the many years in which I suffered anxiety and panic disorder, I did not understand that acted-on fear or doubt is a sin, but that ignorance only accentuated the condemnation and negative consequences. I lacked the strength of character and trust in God to admit that my acted-upon doubt and fear was a sin. When I placed Christ at the center, I slowly realized the great truths: that experiencing fear and doubt is a temptation and not sin, that God forgives all sins, and hence I am set free by the blood of Christ.

I do not have to deny or repress my fear and doubt, and when I fail and act on fear and doubt, I run to the Cross and receive loving and gentle consolation from my Father as I confess, repent, and renounce. I am further comforted that when I am disciplined by God, it is another demonstration of his love and always produces a pleasant fruit (Hebrews 12:11). The Lord is systematically revealing the remaining hidden strongholds of rebellion and their means for exerting influence. In essence, this is an important component of the renewal of our minds through the power of the Holy Spirit. To God be the glory, as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling!

Application Questions

1. How does fear and doubt influence your ability to obey God?
2. What steps and actions can you take to resist the influence of fear and doubt?
3. How can you assist others in recognizing rebellion through fear and doubt?

REBELLION

Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.

“Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers (Isaiah 58:1–3).

Rebellion is a spiritual state that guarantees Christian servant leaders ongoing time in the wilderness. Just as the children of Israel wandered for forty years around that same mountain, we walk the familiar, well-trodden paths when we refuse to repent and acknowledge our guilt. In the previous teaching, we explored the subtle and hidden nature of rebellion, and I would like to explore specific workplace manifestations of mutiny against the Captain of our ship by using personal examples. Satan and our own desires hide the spirit of rebellion from others and us through disguising our true motives.

I am a college professor, and for a significant portion of my professional life, I was in a continual state of “wanderlust.” After a few years, I grew dissatisfied with every job because I became unwilling to face the true root of the problem: my own fears and insecurities that were the product of rebellion. No matter how many times I changed jobs, my strongholds and I remained constant! A move temporarily removes the specific catalytic contextual factors that activate stress, but inevitably, new situations and stressors appear to take their place. I would inevitably focus on the negative aspects of the situation to justify the next move. When I was in my new job, I viewed my prior job with rose-tinted glasses. I created self-fulfilling prophecies by believing the lie that the problem was external, not internal. The cost to my family was great as we moved every three to five years resulting in financial

hardship, the loss of friendships, and the inevitable significant lifestyle adjustment costs.

The crowning example of the power of rebellion relates to an earlier move from Florida to New Jersey. I had a very favorable situation on a personal and professional level, but my weaknesses and fears led me to seek a “safe” position with my mentor. A spirit of fear overtook my decision-making processes, based upon the false belief that I may not earn tenure given the rejection of several research articles. Not surprisingly, they eventually received positive reviews and publication, reinforcing the acronym that FEAR is “false evidence appearing real,” but by then I had an offer from the university and an even greater relationship problem. My mentor had gone through considerable efforts to hire me, and I was fearful of disappointing him if I turned down the offer. One stipulation that I had made was the sale of my house. When the time came, the house remained unsold, and even though all of my family and my own spirit felt uncomfortable with the decision, I accepted the job based upon the “fear of man” rather than the will of God. God went out of his way to indicate the inherent danger with the move.

The result of this rebellion was financial disaster with crushing debt as our house in Miami did not sell and I underestimated the cost of living in New Jersey. To add insult to injury, the move generated complex interpersonal dynamics with existing and future faculty, given the understandable conclusion that I was the “favored son” and heir apparent, creating competition and jealousy within me and the other faculty members. The final ignominy was the suffering of my children and wife who had great difficulty in adjusting to the fast-paced and competitive New Jersey lifestyle. In essence, it was a period of indentured servanthood, like Jacob working for Laban without God’s blessings on my flock (Genesis 31).

All these trials were the fruit of refusing to heed the voice of God to remain in my duty station until released. I learned a very valuable lesson that we are to remain planted, enduring the trials to perfect our faith and prepare us for greater levels of ministry and promotion. My failure to trust God with my fears resulted in a great personal and professional cost, but I learned many valuable lessons. God does take what Satan means for evil and turns it into good (Genesis 50:20), but there are consequences that leave scars. Fear of man is a snare, and rebellion against God results in wandering in the wilderness. I still wrestle with the desire to ramble, but I am now able to cast my fears on God and listen for his voice of release. I realize that all workplaces

manifest weaknesses and God plants us for his greater glory and our wellbeing as we grow spiritually and professionally by patiently enduring trials and cast down deeper roots. May the Lord provide the wisdom and courage to uncover the sources of rebellion in your life for his glory!

Application Questions

1. Have you ever made an important move due to fear of man? If so, what was the outcome? What would you have done differently?
2. What advice would you give to someone in the same situation that was described in the devotional?
3. How difficult is it for you to say “no” to mentors or authority figures? What are the consequences?

ON HEAVEN AND HELL

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:10–15).

One of the most controversial issues in our Christian faith is the existence and nature of hell. As Christian servant leaders, we can never look upon the unsaved without remembering our Great Commission obligations to demonstrate Great Commandment love. The reason is clear: evangelization of the lost is almost impossible without the love of Christ in our spirits. Scripture, world history, and my own experiences have led me to conclude that there is an invisible spiritual world of good and evil, that the devil and demons are real, and that we are directly involved in a fearsome struggle in both the temporal and spiritual worlds for the souls of humanity (Ephesians 6:10–15).

The existence of evil is ironically a result of God’s nature and his pure and unconditional love of humanity. The existence of Satan and his angels demonstrates that all of God’s creations are made in his image (Genesis 1:26), with the ability to reason and make autonomous

decisions that range from altruistic agape love to narcissistic self-idol worship and the exercise of destructive coercive power. If God had engineered a physical and spiritual universe in which his creations were “programmed” to preclude the possibility of choosing evil, then God would be limiting our ability to experience the key character attribute of God that provides meaning and purpose, which is the ability to give freely the only eternal gift of value: agape love. Genuine love requires a context of autonomy, with the ability to make decisions that promote collective growth.

The existence of hell reinforces the key suppositional principle that God will not force either angelic beings or humans to worship and love him. If we understand the nature of hell, we realize that God is still exercising mercy. As horrific as hell is, it would be infinitely worse to be in the presence of God in an unredeemed state. Man’s fall from grace reflects another important element of hell’s nature. We, because of our autonomy and the legacy of original sin reflected in the free will choice of Adam and Eve, are finite and imperfect. God created Adam and Eve to live in eternal fellowship with God, but forbade certain areas of knowledge given their inherent power to corrupt human nature. Certain knowledge areas are knowable, but destructive to humanity, given our inherent character flaws and the inability to master and control the power unleashed. As long as man obeyed God’s laws, eternal spiritual and physical blessing followed. Adam and Eve made a choice to disobey God’s commandments, thereby introducing a contaminating element that upset the cosmic harmonic balance between God and man (Genesis 3:22). To restore the relationship that was broken, God, the great efficiency expert, used the second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ to atone for the sins and imperfections of the world. God is perfection (Matthew 5:48), and perfection and imperfection cannot coexist in the same dimensional time and space. This is similar to the theory in physics that hypothesizes the universe is held together by a delicate balance between gravity, matter, and antimatter. If matter and antimatter meet, the universe would explode.

There is therefore a gulf that cannot be bridged between humans and God (Luke 16:26). As such, we realize the gap’s ultimate manifestation in the gulf between the saved and unsaved in hell. God never sends anyone to hell against his or her will, but that does not absolve us of responsibility for preaching the gospel and reaching out to the lost before it is too late. Let us strive to commit our hearts to bringing the saving love of Christ to the fallen world, and provide one less excuse for the unsaved to reject Christianity.

Application Questions

1. Do you believe in the biblical view of hell? If not, why not?
2. How does a person's understanding of hell influence how they approach this life?
3. How would you approach a friend who disbelieved in hell?

THE ROOTS OF PRIDE

In my own Christian servant leader walk, I struggle with the influence of pride. Pride is the original sin and one of the most dangerous, because it blinds us to our own weaknesses and transgressions. The reality is that every human being is sinful and falls short of the glory of God (Romans 3:2). Given God's standard of perfection, all of our good works and righteousness are "dirty rags" in the sight of the Lord (Isaiah 64:6). Why? The answer resides in acknowledging that in our sinful state, self-interest always corrupts our motives, means, and ends in some form or fashion. This corruption does not always assume a blatantly carnal identity. Not every sinful action is inherently narcissistic or hedonistic or an act of craven power, greed, or revenge. Hidden prideful, self-serving needs and desires can influence even the most altruistic actions.

Pride is the state of being that says to God, "I can do this myself; I do not need or want you." When we are prideful, we frequently vacillate between two states: vanity and insecurity. This occurs because a prideful state of mind uses the self as the standard of measure in assessing worth. When we feel that we are superior to others, we brim with confidence and a sense of superiority. When we fail to meet the standards of others, waves of doubt, anxiety, jealousy, or envy flow like a toxic oil spill from our souls. All these emotions are destructive over the long run.

From a Christian perspective, all of our abilities are a gift from God; hence, we cannot take credit for them. God vests gifts and talents to be used for our unique life mission in each one of us, and seeking God's guidance facilitates understanding of his will. We assess our progress in relation to our movement in meeting God's goals for our life. As the Scriptures state, fear only God, not man (Matthew 10:28).

The other aspect related to this issue is taking joy in the success and abilities of others and sadness when they fail, even for our enemies or those who have hurt us (Proverbs 24:17). This requires a genuine confidence in our relationship with God and a clear understanding of our identity and inherent worth in Christ as children of the Most High.

We clearly learn the most in adversity, but are tested the most in prosperity. This truth is an important element to master. When we are in the midst of life's trials, it is much easier for God to secure our attention. Self-interest is a powerful motivator to draw close to God to receive wisdom, healing, protection, and comfort. However, the great challenge is our focus and motivation when success arrives. Success diminishes our self-motivation to seek God's presence, as we are more complacent and possess powerful supports. The temptation is to assume an excessive degree of responsibility for our success, discounting the influence, provision, and protection of God. In essence, we are all members of a grand team.

No one is a completely self-made man or woman. In essence, we all stand on the backs of others who have contributed to the conditions that make our achievements possible. In addition, we often fail to recognize God's protection in the spiritual and unseen realm. There are an infinite number of elements that the Lord holds back each day that could adversely influence our health, success, and wellbeing. In addition, God provides all of our gifts and abilities (mental, physical, and spiritual); hence we cannot boast and assume credit. Humility is the only appropriate response.

Application Questions

1. How does pride influence how you see yourself and others?
2. What are your greatest temptations when it comes to pride? How can they be overcome?
3. What are the cues that help us identify pride in others and ourselves?

LEARN TO WALK THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW PATH BETWEEN PRIDE AND DISCOURAGEMENT

Satan will use both discouragement and encouragement to deceive us as servant leaders. As such, we must be intimately "plugged in" with the Lord to understand the difference between the enemy's voice and God's voice. Clearly, the enemy will use negative self-talk to paralyze and sow seeds of destruction. The will appears in the form of condemnation, shame, depression, hopelessness, and despair that is disproportionate to the magnitude of the problem. This is termed emotional reasoning in which the consequences are exaggerated. The goal is to steal our identity in Christ and replace it with a false image of despair and hopelessness. Hence, these worries dominate our thoughts like

invasive species of weeds that “crowd” out our ability to focus on the “precious present” and love passionately by reflecting and meditating on God and the needs of others. “I feel like a loser, so I must be one” becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that dominates the meditations of our heart.

In reality, the blood of Jesus washes clean our identity so we are not defined by our sins, weaknesses, or failures, and we are children of God who fail, but are not failures! In other cases, the external circumstances are very imposing with many real giants in our path. In this common scenario, Satan will attempt to convince us to use our natural or more limited spiritual resources instead of relying on the supernatural power of God. This mindset short-circuits the Lord’s will and his power. This emotional and thought negativity has a variety of origins, including mental illness and other generational curses. Others are the products of dysfunctional or traumatic relationships.

Conversely, Satan will use encouragement and positive affirmation to deceive us through pride, complacency, and overconfidence. Hence, even though our conscience is clear (1 Corinthians 4:4), we cannot always trust the absence of pain or doubt. A powerful lesson is our need to receive the guidance and correction of the Holy Spirit, to rest in his grace and love, and to respond to his discipline. Both are essential and require discernment and balance.

Another serious roadblock to spiritual growth is to believe that my sin is too heinous to be forgiven. We are all sinners, and fall short of his glory (Romans 3:23). Evangelist Joyce Meyers gave the analogy that I like best. We have a gap wider than the Grand Canyon between God and us! In order to bridge this gap caused by our sinful nature, we cannot rely on our own efforts. No one can jump across the Grand Canyon. The greatest human long jumper can only jump twenty-eight feet or so. I can jump about six feet. Both of us are heading over the cliff and into the pit based upon our own power if we attempt to “jump” the Grand Canyon.

Do not make the mistake of comparing yourself to others. If you think that you are more righteous, that produces a very dangerous form of pride. If you deem your sin as more serious, you may be discouraged and adopt the lie that your sin “is too big to forgive.” This in itself is a hidden form of pride that God’s love and grace cannot erase your sin, placing your problems above God’s power. The key passage in Scripture illustrating the lethal effect of pride is the contrast between the sinful but repentant posture of the tax collector versus the self-righteous smugness of the Pharisee (Luke 9). Only the petition of the tax collector received the Lord’s blessing!

Conversely, a belief that others possess more righteousness than we do breeds insecurity and discouragement. This principle translates into a multitude of other areas in our lives. Seek God's will for your life with laser-like intensity, and assess who you are and what progress you are making while using only God as a reference point, not the experiences of other persons. A wonderful passage that reflects this is Galatians 6:4–5, which states that we should pay attention to our own work and will not need to compare ourselves to others, as we are each responsible for our own work.

For example, God's plan for you may include being a public school teacher with inner-city kids rather than a college professor at an Ivy League school making a six-figure income. You will find peace, joy, and fulfillment by focusing on your Christ-directed destiny. Conversely, insecurity and jealousy dominate your thoughts when comparisons based on societal definitions of wealth, beauty, intellect, and power are made.

Application Questions

1. What issues in your life make it difficult to forgive yourself or others?
2. How does the “spirit of comparison” influence your life?
3. How can you overcome the “spirit of comparison”?

CHAPTER 11



OVERCOMING STRONGHOLDS

ENCOURAGEMENT TO A FRIEND

What do you say to a friend who is in the grip of a desert experience and gripped by an overwhelming sense of failure and condemnation? What do you say to yourself when you are in the midst of the storm? Below is a letter that expresses important scriptural truths:

Hello My Friend

As I was praying today, the Lord prompted me to search for Bible passages to reassure you. We all fail, we all sin, and we all fall short of the glory of God. However, it is in the great depths of despair and darkness that we die to the self, surrender more completely, bare our souls more genuinely, and cast upon the Lord the many heavy burdens that weigh down our spirits. These times in the valley are the beginning of a new dawn of transformation, healing, and the shedding of layers of self-deception that hide and disguise the truth. I know that this weapon formed against you will not prosper and like Joseph, this time in prison will be for God's greater glory! We only fail when we permanently embrace worldly sorrow and agree with the lie of Satan that there is no hope and God has abandoned us. Mistakes and failures are necessary character- and faith-builders precisely because they are painful and demand our undivided and complete attention. Failure strips our internal defenses and we learn the folly of self-reliance. Yes, the Lord is chastising, but rest assured and receive comfort in the knowledge that his discipline is always for our betterment and produces a pleasant fruit, as is noted in Proverbs 3:11 below.

My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Do not listen to and follow the dictates of your emotions at this turbulent time, no matter how strong or powerful the buffeting. Our conscience, when in a state of self-condemnation, will deceive us. Follow the truth of Scripture, what you know to be true in spite of what you think or how you feel. This verse from John addresses the lie of "emotional reasoning":

And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 John 3:18–19).

God knows what is in your heart and how much you love him. None of us is perfect. We all have a weak carnal nature that wars with the spirit. What is important now is that you rest in grace and ask for guidance and forgiveness as you confess, repent, and renounce your mistakes and sins. Why was David a man after God's own heart in spite of his many terrible transgressions? Because he confessed his sins sincerely and despised them; love the sinner and hate the sin, especially when the sinner is you!

Paul, the great apostle of faith, struggled with these same issues as reflected in Romans 7. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. We need to cast out spiritual perfectionism, a form of legalism, works, and pride of the flesh. Read Paul's heartfelt statement of his personal struggle with his carnal nature. You are not alone!

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me (Romans 7:15–20).

The good news is that God's strength is growing in your present weakness. The first step to deliverance is to recognize the areas of sin in our lives and to acknowledge the need for repentance. Hence, the first step is the desire to become "well." If we desire to repent for our sin and change our lives, even if we fail and struggle, God understands

and is patient. Again, Paul provides a humble roadmap in the famous thorn-in-the-flesh passage:

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The wonderful news is that there is no condemnation, only love, forgiveness, and restoration, as I know that you walk after the spirit:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

So think on those things that are good, focus your mind on God, and be comforted by the fact that nothing can separate you from the love of Christ.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37–39).

The path to victory in the midst of the storm is always at the foot of the Cross, to return to the Maker and Giver of our redeemed lives and to rest in Jesus’ peace, relief, and forgiveness. Never forget the following principles:

1. God loves you unconditionally and he will meet you where you are. He died for you before you were born and were a sinner (Romans 5:8).
2. God loves and forgives you unconditionally. Be patient with yourself. What is the evidence? In Luke 23:43 Jesus forgave the thief on the cross who repented with his final breath. In Luke 23:34 Jesus forgave those who crucified him. How many times should we forgive others? In Matthew 18:22, Jesus calls upon us to forgive not seven times seven, but seventy times seven. We need to embrace that same approach in forgiving ourselves. Perhaps the most powerful example is that of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–24 who squandered his entire inheritance but was forgiven by his father. This is a parable not only for the waste of money, but also for the full range of gifts that God grants us, including our faith. If these

were not enough, we have the parable of the vineyard workers in Matthew 20:16, in which the first shall be last, and the last shall be first in equally receiving God's grace. Always remember that in Jeremiah 31:34, God remembers our sin no more and in Psalm 13:12, God forgives our sins as far as the east is from the west. What a precious treasure trove of grace!

3. The great design of redemption rejects a perfect human repentance. God's perfect design incorporates our ongoing human frailty as Christ understands and fully takes into account our sins, failures, and weaknesses. One of the most reassuring messages in all Scripture is about how Jesus treated his disciples after their individual and collective failures at the trial and crucifixion in John 20:21 and John 20:26, by stating to them, "Peace be unto you." Jesus always reaches out to restore and bring peace back into our lives and assuage our shattered conscience. As he showered grace to the disciples, God will do the same for you, as the apostle Paul stated in Romans 2:11. As God is no respecter of persons, he always forgives, heals, and restores! Our response with each failure, sin, and misstep is to reach out to God as Paul exhorts in Romans 10:13, as all those who call upon the name of the Lord are saved. We can rest assured that all things work out for the best for those who love God and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28).

Meditate on these things, my friends, as God will never leave nor forsake you. Your friend in Christ!

Application Questions

1. Think of a friend that is struggling with a serious issue. How can you best help him or her?
2. What are the obstacles that keep us from helping friends in need? How can we overcome them?
3. What biblical principles from the devotional are most helpful when friends are depressed? How can you use them to help your friends persevere?

RECOGNIZING STRONGHOLDS

For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Our Christian walk as servant leaders is a glorious adventure, but with hidden dangers of spiritual warfare. One of the most pernicious is

strongholds. Os Hillman (2014, February 16) has a very clear definition of a stronghold:

A stronghold is a fortress of thoughts that controls and influences our attitudes. They color how we view certain situations, circumstances, or people. When these thoughts and activities become habitual, we allow a spiritual fortress to be built around us. We become so used to responding to the “voice” of that spirit, that its abode in us is secure. All of this happens on a subconscious level.

Strongholds produce strong passions and emotions, including fear, anger, jealousy, and rejection, among many others. Strongholds frequently go unrecognized, given that they habitually center on God-honoring activities and motives. I struggle with work-related strongholds of perfectionism and affirmation addiction in which “the job” sometimes becomes a “god,” giving a foothold to fear and the cares of this life, thereby sowing tares in our wheat fields. We become so busy laboring in God’s name that we forget that we are under his authority in a God-directed partnership. What are some of the key indicators of a stronghold’s presence? One telltale factor is the drive to succeed, irrespective of the cost.

God always leads us, while strongholds compel us with an exaggerated sense of duty, obligation, and compulsion that extinguish the joy, peace, and satisfaction of working in harmony with the Lord. In effect, the stronghold becomes our master, as we begin to rationalize that our fleshly motives are synonymous with God’s will. A second factor is that the stronghold becomes more important than obeying God. When our ministry becomes a god, we refuse to walk up our own personal Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) and sacrifice what is most precious to us. Like Peter after the resurrection in John 21:15, God is asking me, “Gary, do you love me more than these?” And I say, “Yes, Lord, you know I do.” However, our actions contradict our words. In effect, desensitization represses the pain. We prefer living in bondage with our known stronghold than facing the fear of an unknown future in which the stronghold “splinter” is removed. In essence, Jesus is asking us the same question as the man at the Pool of Siloam: Do we want to get well? (John 5:1–15) Often, the answer is really no, and like the crippled man at the pool, we always have an excuse, as we grow comfortable and accustomed to the pain.

A third element of a stronghold is an unrelenting rumination, obsession, and “what-if” focus dominating our thinking patterns. Essentially, where your treasure is, that is where your heart (and thoughts) also

resides (Matthew 6:21). It seems at times that my work took precedence over my wife's cancer, at least at a thought frequency level. Strongholds overwhelm our spiritual peace when we assign them a higher precedence given an endemic double-mindedness. When I was with my wife, my thoughts frequently focused on the work that needed to be done, and when I was working, I experienced guilt over neglecting my wife.

What is the underlying root cause of a stronghold? The motives are always self-promoting, and in my case, it was the fear of failure and the perceived negative judgments of others concurrently with my desire to gain approval, acceptance, and affirmation through performance and works. In contrast, agape love is the sole foundation of godly motives: the unselfish placing of the needs of others over our own.

Each stronghold possesses a unique set of causal factors, but the underlying principle is relying on a counterfeit source for unconditional love, forgiveness, affirmation, and significance. For example, we can confuse God's will with that of our ministry or vocational work. When affirmation anxiety is the prime motivating factor, appearance—the question, “What would my fellow Christians think”—becomes the most important element. We operate under the mistaken assumption that other Christians are hearing or speaking for God, and that is clearly not always the case. The central question is to focus our thoughts on what motivates and grieves Jesus: What does he think and what would he do?

When we are committed to success irrespective of the cost, place our ministry above God's will, and find our thoughts dominated by the issue, we need to confess, repent, and renounce our sin. The first step in overthrowing a stronghold is to recognize its presence by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal and illuminate the flawed thought and behavioral patterns. We must “test our spirits” and confess what the Holy Spirit reveals. This is much more difficult to implement in practice, given our proclivity for denial and the stronghold's resistance to discovery, identification, and eradication. We then must seek the Holy Spirit's power to change our thought patterns. We cannot accomplish this task based upon intellect, self-will, and effort.

The good news is that when we recognize and challenge our strongholds, our trust in God grows as we begin to view our situation from an eternal perspective. The strongholds that Jesus frees us from become a great source of ministry, healing, and a demonstration of God's victory. So please do not weary in your well doing (Galatians 6:9), and trust the Lord for victory over every stronghold in your life.

Application Questions

1. What strongholds are at work in your life? How do they influence your thoughts and behaviors?
2. What steps are needed to cast out the strongholds in your life? Develop an action plan to accomplish this objective with the Lord's help.
3. How can you help others address their strongholds?

AFFIRMATION ANXIETY/ADDICTION

The fear of other lays a snare, but one who trusts in the Lord is secure. Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe (Proverbs 29:25).

for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God (John 12:43).

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:6).

Our collective journey into the realm of servant leader spiritual intelligence carries us to many uncomfortable places. Our self-awareness regarding our weaknesses and sins is most acute when stripped of our conventional defenses that provide a false sense of comfort and security. For those of us who experience what is termed “affirmation anxiety,” the performance evaluation process is clearly a “step on the water” experience. Affirmation anxiety is the term used for the apprehension associated with the need to receive positive feedback and recognition. We all experience this condition at one time or another, given the inherent human need for affirmation, support, and direct evidence regarding the fruit of our labors.

Christian servant leadership management requires us to recognize, support, and encourage employees to cultivate hope and confidence. Concurrently, we must provide accountability (tough love), entailing the setting of standards and providing corrective feedback. As Scripture states in Hebrews 12, those whom God loves, he disciplines. It is important to seek out and be responsive to external feedback, but more so to resist being controlled by it. When we place more weight on the praise and feedback of men than we do on the word of God, we are vulnerable to a whole range of dysfunctions. Only God can love us and forgive us unconditionally, and if we assign more importance to human feedback, it becomes an idol, and thus, a source of fear and insecurity. Being “made in the image of God” with the ability to love

God and our neighbors with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength is the basis of our priceless worth and unique creation. Natural affirmation anxiety frequently morphs into affirmation addiction. The root lie is that in order for us to achieve meaning, self-purpose, and success, we must “earn” the approval of others and achieve worldly definitions of success. In essence, we defer to human standards and judgment the foundational definition of our self-worth and the meaning and degree of our success, discounting God’s standards of attainment and obedience, Christ-like character, and love. We thereby lose control of our emotional and spiritual peace. In effect, we delegate our sense of self-worth and wellbeing to the frequently fickle, unreliable, and invalid assessment of human wisdom and judgment.

God calls on us to work to the best of our ability and to seek excellence while maintaining a sense of godly perspective and priority. When we recognize the primacy of the eternal performance standards, we understand implicitly that the temporal assessments of the workplace will not stand the test of eternity unless the foundation rests upon godly love. As the apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13, we can possess all knowledge and wisdom (and, we can infer, worldly success and the praise of men as well), but without love, it profits us nothing. When we place workplace performance feedback in its proper perspective, we are better able to learn from our mistakes and improve performance, be more emotionally stable, and pursue excellence rather than perfectionism (which inhibits growth from fear of failure robbing us of our joy).

I am a “work in progress” in this area as well, as I am learning to allow myself to fail and exhibit weakness. A good example relates to my vocation as a college professor and teaching ratings. The perfectionist in me gets discouraged when one student or a small group of students provides a low rating (the “lost sheep” phenomena in reverse). The godly perspective is to recognize that Jesus did not please, nor did he attempt to please, everyone. So it is foolish for me to attempt a feat that is both impossible and contrary to the example set by Jesus and scriptural teachings. I do not have to be perfect to be a good instructor. My goal is to be open to feedback and make improvements (the teacher must be teachable!). I am improving in this area, but it is an ongoing challenge, given our inherent tendency to focus on the exception. Let us all commit to place Christ at the center of every area of our life and adopt the liberating standards of godly achievement.

Application Questions

1. How does the need for affirmation influence your thoughts, actions, and beliefs?
2. How would you help a friend struggling with affirmation anxiety?
3. What are the main causes of affirmation anxiety in your life?

SELF-DECEPTION

The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! (2 Corinthians 13:5).

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:3–5).

Self-deception is one of the “signature” attributes of sin. The ubiquitous spiritual warfare surrounding self-deception entails various forms of rationalizing and externalizing responsibility, in combination with ignorance and lack of self-awareness. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of Good and Evil, they engaged in the first form of self-deception by vainly assuming that they possessed a better understanding of their needs and interests than God (a very presumptuous attitude!). This posture can be likened to a rebellious teenager committing the cardinal mistake of “second guessing” God and usurping control by rejecting parental judgment and standards of conduct. In effect, self-deception is a foundational element of our attempt to assume the role of God.

Interestingly, self-deception is only possible because God delegates free will decision-making authority to humans made in his image; a paradoxical outcome, given the inherent irrationality of pursuing evil over good. We follow this self-fraudulent path since sin actively misleads and disguises both its root and consequences. Sin by its very nature assumes control of our decision-making processes, thereby reducing our degree of self-control and autonomy. With continued

transgressions, the ability to resist sinful desires weakens with the searing of our conscience and we become slaves to sin (1 Timothy 4:2). Self-deception is rooted in our own evil desires, in effect, the fruit of acted upon temptation when tempted by our personal lusts and the influence of the satanic and demonic realm. Loving yourself as God made you is loving God!

What is the remedy for self-deception? The key lies in the employment of 360-degree testing and assessment. Our walk with the Lord is like peeling away the layers of an onion as we die to the self. There is no need for self-condemnation, only conviction and self-awareness in this struggle that is never complete. Only the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit illuminates the dark corners of our lives that are the fertile breeding grounds for self-deception. The relentless pursuit of God's presence—through the foundational spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, fellowship, worship, and praise—permits the Holy Spirit to separate the godly “wheat” from fleshly “chaff” motives. As human beings, we judge both our personal motives and those of others using deficient and contaminated standards and criteria, while only God discerns the true motives of the heart. If the Holy Spirit lives in us, the Holy Spirit as teacher and counselor reveals the nature of our motives and its ultimate fruit through our conscience, providential circumstances, life events, and through the encouragement and discipline received from other members of the Body of Christ.

Unconfessed sin mutes the Spirit's voice and reduces our desire and commitment to entering the presence of God. As we mature as Christians, the process of self-discovery is very painful and humbling as we discover, to our surprise and chagrin, that the foundations of our “God-honoring” actions are made of substandard building materials. The Holy Spirit is our building inspector and provides both the motivation and means to remedy our “code” violations. I am experiencing the gentle but firm conviction of the Lord firsthand in many ways. The first response is to ask the Lord for his wisdom and discernment in testing our hearts. Pray earnestly that we identify anything that displeases the Lord and then “cut it out and kill it.”

A foundational question for Christian servant leaders is identifying our motives for service. As a faculty member, I realize that a spirit of vanity drives and operates through the need for personal recognition and affirmation. If we actively seek appreciation and acknowledgment from others, their fickle attitudes and actions control the needs of our ever-increasing egos. When we die to the self, we understand that the only enduring and truthful recognition and affirmation comes from

the Lord. If we receive recognition and affirmation from others, it is a “bonus,” but we do not expect kudos for our actions, gaining freedom from anger when others reject the law of reciprocity and its associated notions of fairness by overlooking or criticizing a good deed or excellent performance. It is a great joy to be free of the “personal rights” mindset. God understands that we need recognition, as Scripture emphasizes encouraging and rewarding others, but not to expect or demand it! One test for fleshly motives is the types of thoughts and emotions produced when our performance is not recognized or criticized.

For example, because of my insecurity with public speaking, I have a strong need for affirmation after every speech. If I do not receive it, I assume that I was not effective and I ruminate on the always-present flaws (no speech is ever perfect). Did I let my nervousness show? Why did I forget that important point I wanted to make? Why did I not answer that last question clearly? Round and round we go in the mixed motive merry-go-round! Did the audience like me? With God-honoring motives, we only assess the speech in terms of our obedience, whether the motive was to love God or others, whether we gave our best effort, and how we can improve. God is responsible for the outcome. A successful speech with effusive praise is the other end of the spectrum. If we are only concerned about our performance and the praise we receive, instead of the godly fruit, pride and vanity control us (1 Corinthians 13). If I speak with the tongues of angels, but have not love (the only godly motive), it profits us nothing. We plant, but God gives the increase. God requires only our obedience in achieving heavenly objectives, while we desire to be justified by our personal agenda and efforts. Recognizing that God realizes his purposes irrespective of our personal performance is comforting once we let go of the ego. Do you have the courage to cease from your own labors? Can you respond like John the Baptist when confronted with a diminishing ministry that I must decrease and he must increase? Let go of every mixed motive and the spirit of self-deception. May the Lord open your eyes and soften your hearts!

Application Questions

1. How does self-deception influence your thoughts and actions? What are your weak areas?
2. How can you use Scripture and prayer to identify and change our motives?
3. How can you help others to uncover their self-deception?

EMOTIONAL/SPIRITUAL PERFECTIONISM

For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).

Evangelist Joyce Meyers stresses that the mind is the foundational spiritual warfare battlefield, the locus of our free will decision-making gift. Every day we think thousands of thoughts and make hundreds of small decisions, all imbedded within the emotional landscape of our mind. As Christians, God call us to cast down all vain imaginations and bring every thought captive. What does this require? To address this issue, let us reflect on the relationship between emotion, thought, and actions. I do not believe that it is an oversight that Paul does not call us to bring every emotion captive. Thoughts are discrete and identifiable, while emotions are free floating and not linked to thoughts in a linear fashion. Emotions, positive, negative, or neutral, provide color to our mental world and are necessary elements for godly decision-making. We cannot completely control our emotions, but we can manage them.

Emotions are a precursor to conscious thought. We feel first, and then “rationally” interpret our emotions. It is not a linear relationship as our initial thoughts influence our subsequent emotions, which in turn influence our thoughts in an ongoing cycle. In essence, it is a complex loop system, in which emotions and thoughts are simultaneously both cause and effects. To complicate things even more, we cannot completely control our thoughts either as they arise from the collective emotional unconscious and other forces, including the realm of spiritual warfare, our own fleshy lusts, and overt and subliminal messages from the world around us. So how do we bring thoughts captive? The answer lies in understanding the nature of the spiritual warfare. Thoughts, no matter how loathsome, are not sins, but temptations. They only become sins when they form vain imaginations that are accepted, embraced, and controlling.

Jesus illustrates this principle when he states that whoever lusts after a woman has committed adultery (Matthew 5:27–28). Lust implies a conscious agreement with the object of the thoughts, in this case to commit a sexual act, not thinking an isolated or a series of repetitive thoughts that we resist in the proper fashion.

The first principle of avoiding emotional perfectionism is to recognize that negative thoughts and emotions are not sins unless we embrace and act on them, either in our mind or in our behavior. Jesus was tempted as we were, yet without sin. Many Christians needlessly punish themselves for negative thoughts and feelings, and Satan will add to our misery by taking advantage of our confusion regarding the difference between temptation and sin. As long as we are in the body, Satan as a ruling power uses negative thoughts and emotions to harass, tempt, and deceive, and regretfully, we all act on some of these and commit sin. As saved Christians, the blood of Jesus covers every sin; hence, our thought transgressions do not control or imprison.

A very effective strategy that the devil employs is to convince us that repressing negative and sinful thoughts solves the problem. We cannot repress our negative thoughts and emotions, as this only increases their saliency, intensity, and power over us in a latent (delayed) manner. To bring thoughts captive, we must utilize the biblical tradition modeled by Jesus. I call this the three Rs: to *rebut* the negative thought with the Word of God; to *replace*, not repress, with a God-honoring alternative; and to *rest and reflect* on the Lord and accept his grace and healing power. For example, when a negative thought arises, such as anger at another person, first, rebut the temptation to retaliate or punish by choosing to forgive. Second, replace the negative thought with prayers for restoration; third, rest and reflect on God's relationship restoration and healing promises, and seek God's guidance and prompting for future action. This provides the needed "cooling" off period for more reasoned, God-honoring decisions.

Another key element is to recognize and accept that God uses negative emotions for a variety of important and necessary functions. Negative emotions are feelings that produce mental discomfort and damaging physiological effects on the body if prolonged or intense in nature. Our brains, nervous systems, and bodies operate in a synergistic fashion as each emotion produces a signature physiological response. Negative emotions such as fear, depression, anxiety, and anger are the "dashboard lights" that indicate that we believe that something or someone is threatening our security, peace, and wellbeing. Negative emotions are an ongoing warning and feedback system. We cannot and would not want to eliminate all negative emotions as they provide important information for problem solving and afford ongoing opportunities for growing in character as we learn to persevere and rely on God's power in overcoming the situation that produces the feelings. Negative emotions force us to reach out, and trust God. They help us to avoid complacency and are keys for repentance and reflection when

we stray from the “straight and narrow path.” We cannot repress them, only rebut, replace, and rest in God in the midst of the storm.

All emotions are God ordained and God-honoring when experienced in the appropriate manner and context. However, a powerful weapon of spiritual warfare is to deceive humanity regarding the appropriate purpose and use of our emotions while producing counterfeits for our destruction. For example, godly fear is the necessary reverence for God that provides the appropriate degree of respect and humility. However, Satan desires to replace “fear of God” with “fear of man” or “fear of evil” to deceive us that men or the devil are more powerful than God. Hence, Satan corrupts our worship given that the placement of any person or object above God produces insecurity and fear as only God can provide unconditional love, forgiveness, and security. Another example is physical fear or the “flight or fight” mechanism, which is essential for coping with danger. Satan’s tactic is to deceive us regarding the appropriate use of this important negative emotion. He misleads by exaggerating the magnitude of danger (molehills into mountains) or inventing imaginary threats (predicting catastrophe through fortune-telling, vain imagination, and fearsome shadows). Satan then imprisons our minds and bodies with stress induced adrenal hormones including adrenaline and cortisol generating overload, and the associated mental and physical exhaustion and action paralysis. Satan’s plan is to create an impenetrable stronghold of spiritual fear that rules our life.

Another very effective strategy of the enemy is to define the problem of negative emotions and the mental illness that they cause (mood disorders such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, agoraphobia, and obsessive-compulsive disorders) in purely bio-chemical terms. Clearly all emotions manifest in the neurology of the brain and physiology of the body, and there is clearly a genetic element that predisposes us to mental illness. However, there is a degree of choice in terms of how we respond to our genetics, family nurture attributes, and environmental and life experience. Hence, God does not hold us accountable for the factors beyond our control, only our free-will response.

There are two temptations. The first is permitting the illness and its symptoms and consequences to define our identity given their power and scope. Instead of being a “child of God made in his image” we become a “depressed,” or “anxious” person framed and imprisoned by the limits of the disability. In essence, we become a slave rather than a free person as we label ourselves thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. We assume the identity of weakness and sin rather than our redeemed state. The second is to view these issues *solely* as a brain

chemistry factor completely removing our volitional (free-will) moral responsibility. In essence, we substitute psychotropic mood-altering drugs for reliance on the Holy Spirit to empower our personal efforts to change thoughts and behaviors. Clearly, medication is often necessary and there is no condemnation for using essential and properly prescribed drugs; however, a complete one hundred percent reliance on medication is ineffective from both a spiritual and medical treatment standpoint.

For example, a combination of drugs and psychotherapy is most effective for most mood disorders such as depression (NAMI, 2014). A “drug first” approach reduces our reliance on the Holy Spirit and the power of God to change our mental processes, brain neurology, and the body’s biochemistry through deep-seated repentance and the associated healing when we make the commitment to assume responsibility for our sinful coping patterns. There is no condemnation for those in Jesus Christ, but we must seek the godly balance that promotes the type of healing that solves the root problem of both sin and sickness. May the Lord provide his grace and favor.

Application Questions

1. How do your moods and emotions influence your thoughts and behavior?
2. What steps can you take to reduce the influence of negative emotions over your behavior?
3. How can you help others to better manage their emotional strongholds?

CHAPTER 12



COURAGE AND OVERCOMING FEAR

FEAR AND BRAVERY

Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the storm that strikes the wicked (Proverbs 3:25).

A great lie of the devil is that in order to be brave you must be fearless. If that were the case, most of the heroes of history would fail to pass this test. When God states, “let not your heart be troubled (John 14:1),” he is communicating a powerful truth. We must make a free-will decision to agree with God’s promises of victory and protection. We consent in a very simple fashion, by trusting God. How can we guard our heart from control by fear? We avoid slavery by praying, surrendering control, calling upon him, worshiping God, repenting, meditating on his promises, and giving thanks. Any one of these actions indicates harmony with God’s will. God tells us to “fear not,” but there is a subtle distinction. God created us with the fear response to protect us against danger. God’s main goal is to reassure you of his protection so you will choose not to act on fear and avoid self-condemnation for experiencing physical fear. Fear is a necessary emotion in the temporal world, but it is a weapon of destruction in the spiritual. The origin of fear is separation from God; hence it is a foretaste of hell: the complete absence of God’s presence.

Thus, the Lord is asking us is to reject acting on fear and to trust him. When we trust God in spite of our fears, his power releases peace in our lives. When fear controls our actions, it becomes sin, because it indicates a lack of faith in God’s power and protection. It is a form of fortune telling, by predicting an evil or negative outcome and a form

of rebellion by not trusting God. A factor that adds confusion to the mix is our misunderstanding regarding the difference between temptation and sin. Jesus was tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). This means that Jesus experienced fear, but did not act on it. A clear expression of this is his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane over the coming crucifixion. He prayed three times for the cup to be removed (Matthew 26:39) but each time God refused, and at the end strengthened Jesus for his upcoming passion. The good news is that acted-on fear is like any other sin, and all we have to do is confess and repent, and God will forgive us. Hence, fear defeats us only if we completely capitulate. Even with surrender, God's grace extends beyond all of our human sins and weaknesses and provides forgiveness if we repent as did the disciples who abandoned Jesus, but were "rehired" by him after the resurrection (John 20–21).

Application Questions

1. What are the greatest risk factors that create fear in your life? How can you reduce their negative effects?
2. How does fear influence your workplace? How can the effects be reduced?
3. What thoughts trigger fear in your life? What God-directed thoughts can replace and rebut their influence?

OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF DEATH

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14–15).

As human beings, one of the distinguishing attributes of human consciousness is the knowledge of our own mortality. The fear of death and our response is an existential element of great importance. From a Christian worldview, God created humanity with an eternal soul. Life does not end; it only enters another stage with our physical death. As an ex-atheist and agnostic, one of the reasons I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior was hope of an eternal life in Christ, in contrast to the fear produced by believing that after death there is only the great void of nothingness. As I mature as a Christian, I still struggle with the fear of death. However, like all issues and weaknesses, if we turn to the Lord, God produces truth, comfort, and revelation to

cope and grow. This is an example of the principle in Romans 8:28 that all things produce good for those that love God and are called according to his purposes.

First, recognize that the fear of death is natural even for the committed Christian. Hence, the beginning step is the acceptance of our mortality. Hebrews 2:14–15 illustrates this principle. However, as Christians, even though we fear natural death, it holds no terror given that we have the hope and assurance of eternal life (1 Corinthians 15) in the perfect peace of the Lord. The contributing factor for the terror of death is either the fear of judgment or the great void, both of which God destroyed by the Cross and the resurrection. As Pastor Henry Wright (2008) notes, we must believe that we have an eternal home, and whether we live one day or one hundred years, in the scope of eternity it is a single atom in the vast expanse of a great universe.

We never truly begin to experience life until we learn to accept our physical death and live for eternity. This spirit is represented repeatedly in the Old and New Testaments from Shedrach, Mischach, and Abendigo (Daniel 3), to Daniel in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6), to the martyrdom of the disciples. Evangelist Smith Wigglesworth captured this spirit by stating it is better to die in faith than it is to live in fear and doubt.

In response, the first question that we all must answer is “Are we right with God?” Jesus illustrated this point very clearly in Luke 13:4 and the falling of the Tower of Siloam. The Pharisees asked if the eighteen men killed were the worst sinners. Jesus replied that they were no different from any other person. The proper response is to confess Jesus as Lord and live our lives in love. If we follow this simple but difficult to live truth, we are ready any time that God calls us home. It is better to die in faith and be with the Lord in the best place, than to live in perpetual fear and doubt; better to be on the frontlines in the Lord's will, than retreating to a false sense of security. We must have faith in his protection until it is our time. It is a question of faith, and trusting in God that his plans are better than ours.

When the fear of death knocks to steal the peace of the present, Jesus is outside and inside of our hearts, and we need to open the door and stand with Jesus in the Word, the love, and the blood, knowing that we are going to the best place. Keep in mind that, as a Christian, God will only call us home after we have completed our mission. Nothing happens to us, including death, without the Lord's permission. When the time comes, God promises to walk gently with us through the dying process.

The key lesson is that once we begin to understand that death is only a transition, we learn to number the days and live for the right

reasons, to love God and others. Here is a “machine gun” set of passages to rebut the fear of death:

- Love is the devil’s “kryptonite.” God is love, and love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8). When we live to love, we go from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:16–18) with our best days always ahead. As we live in God, our love becomes more perfect (1 John 4:17), his perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18), and we recognize that nothing can separate us from his love (Romans 8:38–39). Life is eternal, and nothing can stop us from growing in love; therefore, our most important “job description” element is to live in love. Love is the primary motive, and when we respond in love, we will always be safe as long as we have breath, and beyond.
- The “fear of death” weapon formed against us will not prosper (Isaiah 54:17), and with his peace we can silence every accusing voice as the fear of death becomes our footstool (Luke 20:43). No matter our age, Satan and the fear of death are false prophets (Deuteronomy 18:21–22). Jesus provides us a more abundant life (more love) in both the temporal and eternal. The eternal begins now, and Satan is always attempting to steal the peace of the present by using fear and anxiety over the future. The “fear of death” weapon will not test us beyond our ability to bear. We are not given the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).
- When I am afraid, I trust in God (Psalm 56:3). Day always follows night, and therefore rest and enjoy the now; the precious present!
- As William Wallace (Braveheart) stated when he was questioned about the risks of death in fighting the English, “Yes, we might die. We will all die sooner or later. But we will die for a cause worth dying for. So that our children and their children might live in freedom.” (Hillman, 2014).

Live each moment and day in love, and God’s peace will rule. Whatever the outcome of our battles, he is a cause worth living and dying for! To him be the glory!

Application Questions

1. How afraid of death are you? How does the fear of death influence how you live your life? How can you overcome the fear of death?
2. How does the fear of death influence the world in general?
3. How can you help others overcome their fear of death?

CHAPTER 13



WORKPLACE APOLOGETICS

CONFESSIONS OF A RECOVERING ATHEIST AND AGNOSTIC

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

As Christian servant leaders, God blesses us with unconditional love, grace, and mercy. God meets us where we are, whether it is at the height of heaven, the pit of hell, or somewhere in between. This is a wonderful and comforting Kingdom principle, given our physical, spiritual, and emotional wanderings. Wherever and whenever we call upon the name of the Lord and draw close to him, in agony, in ecstasy, in the midst of the mundane, to soothe our scars, or to celebrate our “crown” moments, Jesus draws close to us. In the spiritual realm, God is never far from us. He surrounds us with his angels, and fills us with his Holy Spirit. The tangible recognition and experience of God’s presence is conditional, however, on a whole host of factors including our obedience, our willingness to forgive, and our transparency. When we hide our weaknesses, sins, doubts and insecurities, we are prisoners of our conscience and the internal condemnatory dialogue.

I confess I am a recovering atheist and agnostic. Like an alcoholic or drug addict, God heals, but there are varying degrees of deliverance from the consequences of our actions. As the recovered drug addict is tempted to smoke that joint or take that pill when placed under stress, I struggle with my doubts about the existence of God when the pressures and stresses mount. How can a Christian filled with the Holy Spirit doubt the existence of God? Let us go back to the roots of my atheism/agnosticism. My family experienced the

pernicious fruits of a spiritually rooted generational curse. My parents divorced when I was four and during a five-year period, my sister and I experienced a highly stressful and painful time during our visitations with my father (various forms of abuse) until my mother severed all relations. During that time of sorrow, fear, and pain, I started to ask the existential questions, “Where is God?” and “Is there even a God?” “If God is loving, how can he permit such painful experiences, especially when professing Christians impose the pain?”

Like many atheists, our doubts are the seedling tares that metastasize into the dark fruit of unbelief and rebellion. Research clearly demonstrates that the dysfunctionality of the family unit, and the father in particular, is the major risk factor for atheism (Vitz, 1999). Why would I believe in a good and benign spiritual and heavenly God when my earthly father fails to protect and love unconditionally? The father is the spiritual head of the household, and his actions influence not only physical and mental health, but spiritual health as well. Interestingly, all atheism and agnostic belief systems carry their own paradoxical contradictions *if there is any seed or root of faith remaining*. As I matured into a teenager, I carried great anger toward God, a product of the pain, fear, and insecurities I developed, the seeds of which would later produce a debilitating panic and anxiety disorder. It is a great irony that I spent so much mental energy disparaging a myth. Why be angry with Santa Claus or the tooth fairy if I did not believe in his existence? I spent long hours obsessively (another mental illness yoke) cursing God, using all forms of foul profanity, but I was even more troubled by the strange sense of guilt, remorse, and shame I felt.

Fast forward to today, as a Christian thirty-five years later, I carry with me another kind of shame and insecurity. How can I now doubt God after eleven years as a Holy Spirit-filled Christian who has personally experienced the peace that passes all understanding, has drunk from the sweet and crystal clear water of Holy Spirit forgiveness and cleansing, experienced a heart transformation that revolutionized my world, and seen miracles in my own life and others? How can I dare still question the existence of God? Is my salvation real and what spirit is within me?

I understand the root of the question. For every manifestation of God in my life, there is a “rival hypothesis,” or an alternative explanation, that incorporates a naturalistic cause. For a cogent critique of theistic belief systems, read Richard Dawkins’ (2006) *The God Delusion*. This drive to “prove” the existence of God is a legacy of my earlier search for a rationale to justify my unbelief. I have not had a compelling personal vision or conversation with Jesus, nor have I had

a Road to Damascus experience, seen anyone rise from the dead, or the ultimate proof, viewed the Second Coming. The devil loves to selectively use Scripture against us (as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness), stoking the fuel of guilt that my faith is false and contingent upon the presence of a sign, the mark of “heart-based” unbelief as exhibited by the Pharisees. This thought frightens me, so the devil uses this ongoing chess match in the mind to sow seeds of contradiction. These questions haunt me and gnaw at my peace, like rats or cockroaches that emerge at night to pollute our homes. Recently, the undead have risen, as has the swearing and anger at God, in a muffled, but discernible fashion. Why has this monster reared its ugly head? How can this happen? The ultimate in silent embarrassment! These are very shameful and painful thoughts, so I do everything I can to rebut using the full armor of God and the renewal of the mind. This warfare is ongoing and exhausting at times, as I realize that I remain at one level a “Doubting Thomas,” and this causes great pain given my gratitude for what God has done in my life. That hurt becomes condemnation when I attempt to repress the thoughts deep within my psyche. Anything that is repressed will reappear in a different, more toxic form, and in my case, it takes the form of anxiety and fear that interfere with my daily activities and walk with God. The devil says, “You call yourself a Christian? What a fraud!” Then in anxious moments, the devil whispers, “There is no one to help you, you are all alone, you are going to die and slip into the great void of nothingness!”

During my most recent episode of insecurity, I was doggedly holding on to the promises of God, but all my spiritual tools and weapons seemed to have no effect until I started calling out to God like Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52), “Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me.” I have learned that when all else fails, go back to the Cross and throw yourself at the master’s feet. God will never leave or forsake a heartfelt cry for help. God’s gentle voice of conviction came soothingly into my heart, “Gary, this is another splinter area that you must give to me for your sanctification and my greater ministry purposes.” I have found that each episode of deep trial produces an epiphany that removes one more buried painful fragment. What was this current crisis about? God led me back to the beginning, when I was a child, experiencing the pain that bound and yoked me for so many years. Where did the anger come from? It comes from the mind unable to understand how a loving God can let the innocent suffer. Anger led to rejection of God, rejection of God begets rebellion, and rebellion begets fear, anxiety, insecurity, and despair. The multitude of idols that replace God ultimately fail to fill the gap in the heart. Pastor Andy Meade states that anything that we

substitute for God ultimately becomes a source of insecurity, as only God loves us unconditionally. God has written eternity into our heart, thereby “hard-wiring” us to worship the transcendent and admit the need for something greater than ourselves.

Belief centers in the heart, not within the mind or in an ever-changing emotional state. We are always being tempted with doubt and unbelief, but if we trust in God, no matter what we feel, God will never leave nor forsake, nor will he condemn us. The clue to the state of your soul is the locus of your fear. The first option is what I term “honest doubt” in which we search for the truth and retain an open mind and heart. In many cases, “honest doubters” are believers that are seeking reassurance and evidence to dispel the fear that God is not real. The second form, stubborn doubt, frequently operates from the premise that there is no God or very little evidence of his existence. In many instances, stubborn doubters resist the concept of God, given their objections to the nature of our world and universe, given the presence of human suffering and a world that is contrary to how they believe a loving God would design the universe. Another common motivation of stubborn doubters is the desire to place man, hence, the self, at the center of the universe, a form of rebellion. To the stubborn doubter, accountability to God is a repugnant concept and their objection (and fear) is the existence of a personal God. I have walked in both forms of doubt in my life, but I thank the Lord for his grace. In my present state, I know now that the root of my fear is honest doubt, and God will answer my questions with compassion, love, and patience.

One of the crafty tools of the devil is for us to confuse temptation and sin, and condemnation and conviction. Cast the areas of shame on the Lord at the foot of the Cross and bring them into the light of day. When we confess our sins and are transparent regarding our areas of humiliation, God begins the healing process and turns our weakness into strength and tools of destruction into means for deliverance (transform evil into good). God uses our humility and transparency to convict, comfort, and inspire others afflicted with the same yokes. In God’s wonderful economy nothing is wasted, not even our sins, pain, and shame.

This principle was illustrated in my life by a relationship begun at church of all places! While attending services with my wife at the Greek Orthodox Church in Memphis, I noticed a man, John Buscelli, who would sit in the front row. God drew my attention to him for reasons I did not understand at the time. We did not know many people at the church, and one day at the coffee hour, we made each other’s acquaintance. What amazed me was the first statement he made after I learned his name. He asked me, “Do you believe that

Jesus was raised from the dead?” I discerned a very strong presence of the Holy Spirit and the desire to help and witness. What are the odds of someone you do not know, in church of all places, asking you a powerful, existential apologetic question? This began an ongoing Sunday dialogue in which we would debate the existence of God and his resurrection from the dead. He asked very challenging questions, but I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to witness someone who had more doubts than I had. After about nine months, I accepted the position at Regent University and I was leaving Memphis. The Lord put John in my heart and led me to present a written testimonial teaching summary of God’s work in my life in overcoming the legacy of doubt and unbelief. It was not an opportune time as we were in the middle of the move and I would be up until 2:00 am writing to John, with my wife asking me to come to sleep and questioning the need for such haste. I later learned why the Lord wanted me to lose sleep. I mailed John the long single-spaced letter of more than ten pages about three weeks after we moved. About a week later, I received a phone call from him on voicemail thanking me for the letter. I will never forget his words as he said, “You really came through for me”; he wanted to talk to me in more detail. The truth is that the Lord came through because that was the last correspondence that I ever received from John. About two weeks later his sister called and said John had died peacefully at the age of 51, after cutting grass during a hot Memphis day.

We all felt in our hearts that he obtained the peace at the end of his life that he failed to achieve through his restless search for truth over his troubled adult years. The first shall be last and the last shall be first (Matthew 19:30). I thank God that I obeyed his call. I realized that day that when the Lord prompts action, we should listen, for we do not know what the future brings. I receive comfort by the knowledge that the Lord used my insecurities to reach out and encourage another. When I enter heaven, I believe one of the first to greet me will be John. I later learned that he was a teacher in the church who regularly wrote Bible lessons for the church newsletter. What irony and agony when we hold on to our doubts! That very principle is leading me to compose this devotional.

We must answer the call of the Lord. He is the God who clearly speaks to me and says, “I will meet you where you are,” as Jesus met Thomas after the resurrection and Peter after his denial. All that is required is a humble confession of our present condition and our need for God’s forgiveness and presence. Being a Doubting Thomas is not a bad place to be if you cast those doubts on God and take his hand! Remember, all you doubters, Thomas was the first disciple to recognize

the complete divinity of Jesus when he stated “my Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). So please pray for me and the other recovering atheists for the self-forgiveness, courage, and understanding to bring the shameful things to light and destroy the strongholds that weigh us down.

Epilogue: As I wrote this devotional today, Os Hillman’s (2000, December 5) message for the same day was entitled “Belief or Unbelief” with the following quote:

Each day your actions affirm or convict you of your belief system. It reveals who the central focus of your life really is—you or God. It reveals who you place your ultimate trust in—you or God. It is one of the great paradoxes for believers. One day we can believe Him to move mountains. The next day we can question His very existence.

Coincidence or God’s voice? As Sir Winston Temple stated, “When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don’t, they don’t.” As Scripture states in Hebrews 13:8, God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and in 2 Timothy 2:13 when we are faithless, he is forever faithful and cannot deny himself. In effect, God is being faithful to his commitment to us to love us unconditionally in spite of our actions and sin. God is truly the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Go in peace.

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. Therefore, when the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord,” he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were again in the house, and this time Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:24–29).

Application Questions

1. How would you characterize your doubts about God? Are they honest doubts or stubborn doubts?
2. What are your specific doubts about God? How can they be overcome?
3. How would you help a friend who had doubts about God?

WITNESSING: THE CURRENT CULTURAL CLIMATE

One of the great obstacles to the growth of the Kingdom is the compartmentalization of the public and private spheres in terms of faith integration. The Enlightenment introduced the notion of the dichotomy between faith and reason, laying the foundation for the sacred and secular divide, relegating the formal expression of religion to the private sphere, while the public marketplace, as broadly defined, was governed by reason and the intellect. In fact, the antiestablishment clause of the Constitution traces its roots to the efforts of Christian evangelical denominations to protect freedom of choice and conscience in practicing religion, unfettered by state church sponsorship (Feldman, 2002). This principle becomes a foundational attribute of secularism, further limiting the role and influence of religion and spirituality. The religious freedom and antiestablishment clauses—originally designed to preclude the establishment of a state church in the First Amendment to the US Constitution—gradually expanded to inhibit or prohibit many forms of religious expression in government and public settings that were previously acceptable cultural manifestations of our shared Christian heritage. Hence, it was not freedom from religion in the marketplace of ideas in the public sphere, but freedom from government sanctioning a specific church.

Hence, in today's legal and cultural milieu, many view religion with a higher degree of suspicion in both the public and private sector "marketplace square." However, as a Christian servant leader, our belief and value system as led by the Holy Spirit is a holistic unity in which we "work out our salvation" in all life domains, including the workplace. While we cannot actively evangelize, the workplace is the next great mission field for the Great Commandment and Great Commission. The only Christian that a coworker may know could be you! As such, we possess a humbling obligation to conduct ourselves with exemplary Christian servant leader character and integrity and allow the Holy Spirit to pour rivers of living water from us by our commitment to godly excellence. Christian servant leader character is the essential element. Unless we live out a Christian life with passionate integrity, we will reinforce the secular negative stereotypes of Christians and inhibit the Kingdom. We have a humbling responsibility to be a "hearer and a doer." If we are men and women that model excellence of performance and love, we will possess the spiritual authority to speak into the lives of those around us. How can we do this with integrity and in a noncoercive fashion? It begins with a basic heart-based integration of the fundamental values and principles of

the Christian faith. Unless we possess relationship integrity with the Lord, we are unable to speak with power into the lives of others. Once we have the light of Christ, the next element is a clear understanding of the foundations of our faith, and the ability to respond intelligently to the many questions that nonbelievers possess.

The following reflections are the fruit of several years of self-examination and searching for answers to my questions regarding the existence of God, his character, and our relationship to him. This work is a product of revelation, personal reflection, study, and the influence of the larger body of believers. I make no claims of originality for these observations, as they reflect general scriptural principles that are “discovered” when we seek God with all our heart. When we live out our Christian walk in the workplace with character and integrity, God will open “window to witness” first with our love and integrity of performance, then second, with questions related to how we are able to live out what we believe. The indwelling Holy Spirit is what calls out to others; as we love and obey God, the anointing opens doors and hearts. To God be the glory!

Application Questions

1. What is your personal view on the expression the “separation of church and state”? Is the concept properly understood and applied?
2. How does our culture marginalize Christianity? What are some of the strategies to isolate Christians?
3. How can you best help a coworker understand the nature of God?

WITNESSING: IS GOD FAIR?

What happened to those who die without ever hearing the name of Jesus? Is it fair that God sends a person to hell for eternity by an accident of birth and time? One response is that we all deserve hell given our sinful nature. However, there is considerable variation within Christianity on this issue. One perspective on this subject emphasizes God’s nature of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. God knows who would have genuinely accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior if he or she had the ability to choose. This conception of “eternal infinite time” recognizes that God exists simultaneously in the past, present, and future in all potential realities and universes, and hence the end, middle, and beginning are known in all possible permutations. Jesus knows what is in our heart, and how we would have lived our life in varying conditions and circumstances, and whether we would have

accepted Jesus if introduced to him in another time and era. Another perspective is that Jesus as Creator of the universe is present in all cultures and time, irrespective of the degree of direct knowledge or understanding of humanity. God has written his law (Romans 2:15) and eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11), hence we possess an inborn need to connect with the transcendent eternal God, a need for worship that fills the gap in our hearts. Other religions formed in which humanity began to worship the created elements (a sun or moon god) rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25), and later created different manifestations of God through other mainstream religions (Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, etc.) This has created the variety of religious orientations. Given that Jesus is the only true Savior and God, the “good-faith” adherents in their heart are actually worshipping Jesus even if they do not recognize him. God in his mercy will therefore honor the faith in the life and heart of the well-meaning believer and grant entrance into heaven and save those who through heartfelt faith honor their understanding of God and in effect are worshipping Jesus without knowing him. The key here is that there are plausible explanations that reinforce that God is merciful and gracious.

Application Questions

1. Do you believe that believers in other religions will gain entrance into heaven? Why or why not?
2. How would you answer a question regarding what Christians believe about other religions?
3. Do you believe that God hears and answers the prayer of non-Christians? Why or why not?

WITNESSING: RECOGNIZING THE LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE

In witnessing to others, it is important to acknowledge the limits of science. Many in the workplace make science their god. All of our measurement methods, our ways of knowing, are imperfect for understanding our physical universe, let alone the prospect of other dimensions and the spiritual realm of the infinite God. The finite cannot master and grasp the infinite (Isaiah 55:8). There will never be an all-encompassing theory of the universe. Even if we believe that we can explain all physical phenomena, there will always be limits to both cognition and imagination. All forms of reasoning, theorizing, and

measurement contain error and are simplifications of reality that deconstruct holistic systems in order to study the component parts and their systematic interrelationships. I agree with the postmodernist on one point: the subjectivity of perception and measurement. Our perception of reality is a joint product of God's biology and our social nature contributing to psychological cognitive and affective meaning and sense making. Hence, "reality" and consciousness are socially constructed and relativistic.

Application Questions

1. How much confidence do you have in science?
2. What are the limitations of science in regard to the spiritual?

WITNESSING: THE NATURE OF FREE WILL

One of the key points to communicate to the seeker is that the spiritual and the physical world mirror each other. God designed the universe based upon the principle of free will. God created man for voluntary fellowship, and forcing humanity to believe, love and have fellowship with him is abhorrent and contrary to his nature and the best interests of human beings created in the image of God. Most of us understand that "true" love in the human realm cannot be manufactured, forced, or bought, and we only grow in our love relationship with God based upon a voluntary, unselfish association. Love based on fear or power is shallow, hypocritical, and deceptive thereby destructive of an enduring and mutually beneficial relationship. "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and the unseen spiritual realm is the locus of God's multi-dimensional pure love nature and presence. Our eternal spirit is the creational offspring of this perpetual love consciousness that manifests both physical and spiritual form. Christian apologist Norman Geisler summarizes this point well (Strobel, 2000) by stating that the evidence for God is available for all to examine and most rejections are due to a matter of will or pride given the resistance to being held accountable. Hence, it a question of submission rather than a lack of evidence as God works through free-will love, not coercion. God will not override our heart-based freedom of choice, even if it comes at the expense of our best interests.

One of the key challenges related to our ability to witness to others is the capacity to love with patience and nonjudgmentalism, and to answer difficult questions that are obstacles to faith.

Application Questions

1. How does the presence of free will influence your view of God?
2. How can you respond in a loving fashion to those who do not believe in free will?

WITNESSING: THE NATURE OF HELL

One of the most controversial issues in our Christian faith is the existence and nature of hell. Scripture, world history, and my own experiences have led me to conclude that there is an invisible spiritual world of good and evil, that the devil and demons are real, and that we are directly involved in a fearsome struggle in both the temporal and spiritual worlds for the souls of humanity (Ephesians 6:10–15). The existence of evil is ironically a result of God’s nature and his pure and unconditional love of humanity. The existence of Satan and his angels demonstrates that all of God’s creations are made in his image (Genesis 1:26), with the ability to reason and make autonomous decisions that range from altruistic agape love to narcissistic self-idol worship and the exercise of destructive coercive power. If God had engineered a physical and spiritual universe in which his creations were “programmed” to preclude the possibility of choosing evil, then God would be limiting our ability to experience the key character attribute of God that provides meaning and purpose, the ability to freely give or withhold the only eternal gift of value, agape love. Autonomy is the foundation of genuine love with the ability to make decisions that promote collective growth.

God does not send anyone to hell against his or her will. We are finite and imperfect in the flesh, given the legacy of original sin reflected in the free-will choice of Adam and Eve. God created Adam and Eve to live in eternal fellowship with him, but God set boundaries given that certain areas of knowledge absent God’s character and wisdom become inherently corrupting. Hence, many knowledge areas are discoverable, but destructive to humanity, given our inability to control the power unleashed. As long as man obeyed God’s laws, eternal spiritual and physical blessing followed. Adam and Eve made a choice to disobey God’s commandments, thereby introducing a contaminating element that upset the cosmic harmonic balance between God and man (Genesis 3:22). To restore the relationship that was broken, God, the great efficiency expert, used the second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, to atone for the sins and imperfection of the world. God is perfection (Matthew 5:48), and perfection and

imperfection cannot coexist in the same dimensional time and space. This is similar to the theory in physics that hypothesizes that the universe is held together by a delicate balance between gravity, matter, and antimatter. If matter and antimatter come into contact, the universe would explode. There is therefore a gulf that cannot be bridged between humans and God (Luke 16:26).

A common objection relates to how a loving God can send “good people” to hell if they do not believe in him. The reply is that our standards of right and wrong, our definition of a “good person,” falls infinitely short of what is necessary to achieve union with God. A relevant Scripture is Isaiah 64:6 which states that all our righteousness is like filthy rags. Our heart is deceptive as even our most altruistic actions possess elements of pride and self-interest (impure motives for righteous conduct, see Jeremiah 17:9). Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (Matthew 6:21), and our hearts serve many different idols including fame, vanity, power, money, pride, and lust. Our conscience deceives us (1 Corinthians 4:3–5) as we commit sins of omission, commission, thought, word, and deed, many of which remain unrecognized. When we violate one aspect of God’s law, we violate all requirements (James 2:10). The Old Testament experience was instructive in this regard. God provided Israel with a clear set of guidelines for conduct, worship, and atonement for sins and transgressions. In recognition of human nature with its associated desires to achieve holiness through self-effort and meritorious works, God promulgated the law (Ten Commandments and the associated rules). “I have earned it with the sweat of my brow.” The collective experience of Israel demonstrates that even when God grants humans a clear road map that conforms to the human proclivity to “earn” our God blessings (and implicitly salvation), we cannot observe clear standards given the reality of sin, selfishness, rebellion and the influence of spiritual evil in this world.

It is important to emphasize to the seeker that in order to restore humanity back to the original state of communion with God, Jesus entered the temporal realm in human form. God, the great efficiency expert, used the death of his son to repair the breach across time and space (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus lived a sinless life, thereby observing all aspects of the law, and his death on the Cross was an atonement for all the sins (past, present, and future) of the world (1 Peter 1:19). This was part of God’s grand design to restore our relationship with him by the ultimate act of grace, the death of Jesus on the Cross, by providing an unearned remedy for sin’s ultimate consequence and fruit, that of physical and spiritual death (Ephesians 2:9). We as humans are

incapable of saving ourselves. We all have a choice of whom to serve (Matthew 6:24), and, in essence, hell is another manifestation of God's love, given that there is a degree of separation, as the worst state possible is to be in the presence of God in an impure and rebellious state. God is perfectly just (Daniel 9:14), and the only people sent to hell are those who choose to reject Jesus and to live without submission to God's authority. The Scriptures clearly indicate there are levels of punishment (Luke 12:48), and by far the worse state is to know the truth of Jesus' redemptive sacrifice and to reject it. For those who died and were not presented with the Christian message of salvation through Jesus, they are judged on how well they adhered to God's law of right and wrong that is written into our hearts (Romans 2:14). Humans are "hard-wired" for ethical and normative awareness; the Golden Rule is part of every society. There is some scriptural evidence that those who did not hear the message of Jesus in their lifetime had an opportunity to accept salvation when Jesus went into hell and preached to the captives (1 Peter 3:19). There is also some speculation that those in other religions who are honestly seeking God, are worshipping Jesus, but under another name. A final perspective is that Jesus knows who would have accepted him as Lord and Savior if they were provided with the opportunity. Irrespective of the true status of unknowing nonbelievers, God is perfectly just, and does not torture his creations. He loves us with a passion beyond our understanding, as evidenced by his willingness to have Jesus endure the humiliation of the Cross, and the associated physical and spiritual suffering.

Another key element in witnessing to the seeker is in stressing the reality and influence of evil in the world. Evil is the product of three major influences: the inherited sin nature predisposing humans to pursue selfish ends, our conscious and deliberate choice to sin, and the influence of the dark spiritual powers. Our rebellion and sin weakens our spiritual "immune system" that protects us from the toxic and destructive influences of demonic forces. In essence, Satan and his demons function as spiritual viruses that seek to infect the soul of humans in order to corrupt our spirit, mind, and body while deriving nourishment from our negative emotions and behaviors. The goal is to deceive us into believing untruths about God and our relationship to him that contaminate our motives, thoughts, and actions, producing a bitter fruit of self-condemnation, self-destruction, and the ruination of others (John 10:10). The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross mortally wounded and defeated Satan (Romans 16:20), but his pride vents his wrath against the most precious of God's creations, human beings made in his image. The only way for Satan to impose pain on

God is by causing destruction and suffering in human beings, and with the ultimate sorrow the loss of salvation, the destruction of our souls (John 8:44; 1 Peter 5:8). The only power that Satan possesses over the believer is the authority we delegate to him by agreeing with Satan's gospel and logic as we act on our temptations (as did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3:1–19; James 4:7).

Application Questions

1. Do you believe in hell? Why or why not?
2. What in your opinion is the most persuasive objection to hell? How would you rebut the objection?

WITNESSING: REFLECTIONS ON SUFFERING

Another critical area to address in overcoming objections to the existence and nature of God relates to why God permits suffering. A great question to answer is that if God is benevolent and loving, why does he permit evil and suffering? The first response relates back to free will. God will not take away our right to choose good or evil (Matthew 6:24). Our choices reflect the motives and needs of our heart manifesting consequences that range from destructive, to benign to restorative. Our world's spiritual and cultural economy is the aggregated product of collective decisions made by individuals, families, and social institutions. This world is in a fallen state (Romans 5:12, Ephesians 6:12), hence it is a battleground between good, evil, and human indifference. The end result is individual and collective evil and sin, errors of commission and omission, evil thoughts, words, and deeds that estrange us from God, ourselves and others (Romans 6:16).

The second response is that there is an ultimate accounting for our actions that will remedy injustice and suffering in this world (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:11). A comforting principle is that nothing in God's economy is wasted. God hates evil, and he suffers more than we can comprehend when his children sin and hurt themselves and others. A clue to this relates to the teachings of Jesus that state that when we help the "least of these" we are helping Jesus (Matthew 25:31–46), and I believe the converse is true. When we harm the "least of these," we are harming Jesus directly as well. Hence, Jesus as God directly experiences the pain of each suffering soul. In reality, we are all "the least of these" given our spiritual poverty and condition. There is an ultimate accounting of all our actions after death. For the believer, the worst suffering here on earth is not worthy to be compared to the

benefits and blessing of eternity with God in heaven (2 Corinthians 4:17). Without this belief and faith statement, the suffering and pain in this world appears to be arbitrary, cruel, meaningless, and sadistic. As Christians, we are promised that God will never leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), that he will comfort, sustain and strengthen us in the most horrific of circumstances (Psalm 34:19), but there is no guarantee against earthly suffering and injustice. We, as finite creatures, cannot discern God's plans nor judge God's decisions using human standards. The Scriptures state this clearly in Isaiah 55:7–9:

Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.

By accidents of birth and geography, the lives of humans vary dramatically in length and quality, both between and within nations. After death, there will be an accounting in which justice will be rendered according to our faith and deeds, with mercy and grace for those who accept Jesus genuinely (Hebrews 9:27). If one rejects this assumption, then no degree of philosophizing or rational argument can reconcile the magnitude of the injustices in this temporal world. God sent Jesus to die for us as a precious gift to remedy our individual and collective evil (John 3:16). It is the height of hubris to reject the existence of God or his offer of salvation based upon human standards of how a “just” world would operate. We must humble ourselves and trust God, just as a small child trusts his parents to make decisions in his or her best interests (Mark 10:14–16).

In your dialogue with a coworker or other seekers, gently reinforce that God uses suffering and pain to draw us closer to him, to increase our faith and refine our character (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:7–8), and to remove the illusions and fantasy of individual self-sufficiency by relying on the idols of this world (money, power, education, physical and mental health, and the intellect) (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). Jesus understands the nature of suffering given the horrific physical and spiritual trauma of the crucifixion, hence God has a firsthand experience and empathy for the human condition. When we are broken and suffering, God comforts and restores (Psalm 34:18). He encourages the discouraged (2 Corinthians 7:6). A great spiritual truth is that our suffering in this life is not in vain, as all things (good, evil, and all in between) in our lives promote good for those who love God and are

called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). A great scriptural example of this principle is the story of Joseph and his enslavement at the hands of his brothers (Genesis 37:28). This traumatic event was a crucible for the perfection of his character and the development of abilities essential for greater levels of service that were ultimately used to save his people from a great famine (Genesis 41:27). God will take what Satan means for evil and turn it into a blessing to save others (Genesis 50:20). The Lord helps us to grasp, upon reflection, why we have experienced the valleys and deserts. There will be some situations for which the rationale, meaning, and purpose remains hidden, but will be revealed after death (1 Corinthians 13:11–3). From these life events, we learn more about our character and God’s will for our lives. From our pain, we will be fortified to be a more perfect instrument for God’s will and bring comfort to others (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Another key point for emphasis is that God uses our suffering to bless and encourage others. However, it is critical to communicate this principle empathetically and compassionately matched to the nature, depth, context, and timing of the suffering. To the unbeliever, the principles are foreign, and even to the believer they can ring hollow or cliché-ridden in the midst of the battle when God’s presence, love, and purpose are lost or distant.

Application Questions

1. Do you believe that God is present when we suffer? How does that influence how you experience suffering?
2. What is the greatest challenge in helping others who are suffering and their relationship with God?

WITNESSING: ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS ON SUFFERING

The foundational principle is that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), hence we are stewards, not owners of what God has created in us. How is our suffering of benefit to others? The answer is, in several ways. The first is our good example of patience and perseverance through pain, trials, and suffering (Romans 5:3). A great example is Job, who in the face of crushing sorrow held fast to his faith in God (Job 1:20–22). By trusting God, we demonstrate to others that God’s promises and comfort are greater than the evils of this world (1 John 4:4) and we love the Lord unconditionally regardless of the outcome. Second, when we are hurting, we provide

opportunities for others to exercise compassion, increase their faith, demonstrate mercy, and offer encouragement by giving to others (Luke 10:33–35). We receive blessings when we act as our brother's keeper, hence when we suffer, it provides opportunities for those around us to exercise the spiritual disciplines of empathy, intercession, support, and love (it is better to give than to receive). The result is that both parties are able to withdraw attention from the self (Matthew 16:25): the sufferer by offering their body as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), and the helper by giving of their time, prayers, and support. God ministers to us most clearly, when we are serving others! Even our deaths can be a catalyst to focus God's love and presence, as the family surrounds the dying and the Holy Spirit brings peace, healing, and a sense of reassurance regarding the final destination of our loved ones (Hebrews 11:1). It can be an opportunity where others reevaluate their relationship with God based upon the certainty of death and the vanity of worldly goals and pursuits (Romans 6:16), thereby serving as a catalyst to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior to fill the gap in our hearts and souls (Romans 5:17).

A related corollary is that God bestows all of our gifts and abilities to realize his higher purposes, loving others, reducing pain and suffering, bringing salvation, and worshiping God. That is why we cannot take credit for our accomplishments given that God provides all of our abilities and the opportunity to apply and demonstrate their power and influence. When we measure ourselves against others, we miss the foundational principle that we are all uniquely designed, gifted, and equipped for a specific God-given purpose (Psalm 139:14). Comparisons generate damaging emotions such as pride (superiority), fear (inferiority), complacency (inertia), and conformity (rationalization of sin) (Galatians 6:4). God does instruct us, however, to gauge our individual faith and sanctification progress. We are to focus on how far we have come, not where we are relative to others. God is more concerned with our character development, and the obstacles we overcome, rather than the objective quantity or quality of our accomplishments (Mark 12:42). The Scriptures state this concept clearly as reflected in Mark 10:31, "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Application Questions

1. How has suffering produced good character and results in your life and that of others that you know?
2. What is greatest obstacle to learning from suffering?

WITNESSING: THE INNERRANCY OF THE BIBLE

A major stumbling block to faith is debate regarding the inerrancy of the Bible, but analysis is complicated by varying definitions of the term itself. The first is that the Bible is one hundred percent accurate in all of its elements. Most evangelical and fundamentalists embrace this view. If biblical accounts seem contradictory, improbable, or impossible, either our understanding is limited and darkened, or God as the Creator of the universe altered natural laws to produce any desired outcome that we accept by faith. A second perspective is that the biblical accounts communicate the foundational principles in a form that is comprehensible, but with minor inconsistencies or errors that have no bearing on the validity of the primary message. Hence, the accounts are true, but incomplete or with minor contradictions in their level of detail or record of accounts. The important point is that the Bible clearly communicates the fundamental truths that are necessary for our guidance and understanding. The Catholic and Orthodox churches embrace this view that the Bible is inerrant, but with some inconsistencies or contradictions.

Application Questions

1. How do you view the Bible in terms of its level of inerrancy? Is this an important issue to you? Why or why not?
2. How does the level of inerrancy influence your trust in the Bible?

WITNESSING: THE ETERNAL SPIRIT

In our witnessing efforts, it is important to address the person's beliefs related to the existence of our eternal spirit in heaven. Is there eternal life and is heaven real? It is important to communicate to the seeker that heaven is another dimensional plane of incomparable beauty that is the ultimate state of being and consciousness. Heaven is the eternal dimensional realm of perfection that is beyond our comprehension. The Bible firmly established the existence of heaven with powerful personal experiential reports and confirmations through near-death and other visionary experiences.

The existence of the eternal spirit in heaven is not scientifically verifiable, but there are several indirect indicators. One such factor is the many reported near-death experiences. Others include out-of-body episodes with a direct transport to heaven. If Christianity is true, and we had completely accurate measures of wellbeing, we would find that

Christians would have the highest level of spiritual “health.” Given the impossibility of measuring the state of the spirit in any scientifically verifiable way, we can only use indirect measures that are the product of a healthy spirit, a transformed life, and a changed heart that produces mental and physical wellbeing. Other religions produce many of the same beneficial mental and physical states, but do not provide the most important benefit: freedom from a legalistic “works” mentality along with a certainty and security over our ultimate fate after death.

One of the great misconceptions that seekers have related to heaven is that we will lose our unique personal identities. Scripture indicates clearly that we will retain the essential personality elements that define our self-awareness and consciousness. You will continue to be “you” through eternity. A fundamental law of the physical and hence the spiritual universe is the paradox of unity/uniformity and differentiation. As there are common set of attributes that define the physical characteristics of being human, there is infinite variation within the larger set of uniform global attributes. As no two snowflakes are alike, God’s gift of creativity generates an infinite variety of identities. As part of God’s creation, we are unique but linked. This is another amazing manifestation of the Trinity: blessedly unique, blessedly one, and we possess the best of both worlds, our individual gifts and beauty glorifying the richness of God’s creation, and our unity provides the wholeness and connectedness that makes loving relationships possible. Every beat of our spiritual heart glorifies God through eternity. As each star in the sky is distinctive and inimitable, we will retain everything that is good and beautiful about ourselves.

Application Questions

1. Do you believe that near-death experiences provide proof of life after death? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever met anyone who had a near-death experience? How did it influence their faith?

CHAPTER 14



PRAYERS: OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Prayer is the spiritual “track” for God’s train. This final section of the book provides a variety of prayers to help support our witnessing efforts encouraging ourselves and others. We are called to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

PRAYER: COPING WITH BELIEF AND DOUBT

Dear Lord, help me to understand that both belief and doubt are verbs and we can have intellectual doubts and intellectual unbelief, but still retain our faith. True belief and faith require us to be a hearer and doer. To truly doubt and disbelieve, we must have both thought and action. Lord, do not let the enemy steal our victory. Praise the Lord and help me to stay in faith by rebutting and replacing the negative thoughts. Lord, I thank you for Mark 9:24, which reinforced that heart-based belief triumphs over intellectual unbelief in spite of our thoughts. Lord, I remain in faith when I move forward in doubt and fear like the disciples. True doubt is taking action on our thoughts. Thank you, Jesus, for breaking through my doors of doubt and unbelief. Jesus was tempted in all ways as we were, with unbelief and doubt. Praise the Lord that you are active and present in our lives, even when we cannot see you, even when we were sinners and rejected you, and even when we didn’t believe him. Lord, when we are tempted with condemnation, help us to rest in your grace. Lord, help me to be patient and understand that faith requires a season to grow. Lord, help us to cast out our impatience.

PRAYER: HELP MY UNBELIEF

Dear Lord, help me to realize that the key litmus test of our faith lies in whom we say that we serve. God spoke and reassured me that his standards for salvation are gracious and we serve a God of mercy, forgiveness, and love. The key is Romans 10:9, that if we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that Jesus rose from the dead, we shall be saved. As it states in 1 Corinthians 15:14, our faith and preaching are useless, unless Christ rose from the dead. The key is to profess faith in Jesus and not in pledging fidelity to the Bible or other biblical figures (Hebrews 11:6). God will help us with our unbelief (Mark 9:24) and he calls us to show mercy to those whose faith is wavering (Jude 1:22). Lord, I thank you that where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Romans 5:20) and that your love is patient and kind (1 Corinthians 13). Lord, given that I am forgiven for much, we should love much (Luke 7:47) and blessed are those whose iniquities (Romans 4:7) and transgressions (Psalm 32:1) are forgiven and my sins covered (Psalm 32:1, Romans 4:7). Lord, help me to suspend my intellect and enter the Kingdom as a little child (Mark 10:15, Luke 18:17) as no one can enter the Kingdom through intellect (1 Corinthians 20–26) alone. This is foolishness! Lord, I thank you when our conscience condemns, help us to rest in God “My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we would know if we were living truly, living in God’s reality. It’s also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves” (1 John 3:18–20, Message).

PRAYER: COPING WITH THE PARADOX OF FAITH

Dear Lord, help me accept the paradox of faith that your word can be both literally true and a parable. Lord, help me to accept that all the principles are true and to reject doubt. I pray that I will always trust you over man. Lord, I recognize that I cannot trust my own understanding beyond the level of the heart. Lord, help me to recognize that hardhearted doubt is a spirit and that softhearted, good-faith doubt will help me grow closer to you. Thank you, Lord, for the victory over doubt, but I know I cannot fight this battle alone. I must invite you, Lord, into the midst of my shame that causes me to turn away when I need the Holy Spirit the most. Lord, help me to invite Jesus in to share rest in his peace, and doubt my hard-hearted doubts about God.

Dear Lord, as it states in Daniel 3:16, Lord, I do not need to defend or prove the existence of God to self or others. When circumstances and our own temptations throw us into the furnace of doubt, my God is real and will save me. Lord, and even if I do not fully overcome the doubts and some questions remain unanswered, I will still believe in you and will not serve other gods and bow down to fear and doubt. I will serve the Lord! God is answering my prayers, even with mixed in doubt and unbelief.

PRAYER: ADDRESSING VARIOUS FORMS OF DOUBT

Dear Lord, help me to distinguish the various forms of doubt. Help me to distinguish between honest and stubborn doubt. Help me to realize that when I read the Bible without the Holy Spirit, I cannot understand its true meaning and application to my life and that of others. Help me to read the Bible through your eyes at the spirit level. Help me to understand natural revelation while rejecting condemnation and stubborn resistance, and not seeing the Bible through God's eyes. Help me understand that his ways and thoughts are not our ways. Lord, help me to reject using my limited standards of human wisdom, mindset, and skepticism. Help me to understand both belief and unbelief demands fulfillment and will seek its own, and stubborn doubt rejects empirical evidence of the heart.

PRAYER: OPENING MY SPIRITUAL EYES

Dear Lord, thank you for opening my spiritual and natural eyes to your pure love. Help me to love and give freely and reject the false love based upon control. Lord, please help me to grant others the freedom to choose what is in their heart. Lord, you love us so much that you allow us the freedom to reject your presence and follow what is in our hearts. Lord, your unconditional love allowed Satan and one-third of the angels in God's presence to reject you. Lord, there are atheists in foxholes who would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven. Lord, others will deny that there is a God because of their pride and the unwillingness to serve a truth and power greater unto than themselves. In such a world, time, chance, and an impersonal universe are cold comforts, and in their loneliness, they will attempt to persuade others to adopt the belief system, as misery loves company. They falsely believe that they can find the meaning to make life livable in a passing temporal world. Yes, there are atheists in foxholes, and Lord,

help me to discern the heart so I can witness and not cast your pearls before swine. Thank you, Lord, that I have the pleasure of knowing peace in this world, an unspeakable joy, which is far better than empty pursuits, the hope of a better world to come, the eternal presence of God, the infinite source of love, hope, and protection, a love beyond the self, the key to better present and future life. To God be the glory!

CHAPTER 15



PRAYERS: OVERCOMING FEAR AND ANXIETY

PRAYERS: OVERCOMING FEAR

Praise God, I pray for the strength to be thankful for today and the moment, to enjoy the now in the midst of challenges, and to thank God for his favor and grace. Lord, help me to focus on what the Holy Spirit is doing in my life and starve the flesh. Praise God, I am not alone in my fight against fear; I have the Holy Spirit and the angels. The Holy Spirit and the angels are standing with me and in me. Thank you, Lord, for the “one-step victories” in my life, not perfect obedience, not perfect performance, not human perfect peace, not my righteousness, but the righteousness by faith in Jesus and his grace. I thank you, Jesus, that you make allowance for my weaknesses failures, sins, doubts, unbelief, and when fear controls my thoughts and actions. Help me to reject arguing or debating with the devil, my flesh, and my guilty conscience and fall upon the love, grace, mercy, peace, and the righteousness of Jesus who is our shield and redeemer. Thank you, Lord, for helping me overcome and deliver me from my fear of (enter in the areas of your struggle). Help me to respect my enemies and be as wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove.

PRAYERS: OVERCOMING FEAR, CONTINUATION

Praise the Lord, I thank you that when fear attacks, you are with me and give me the power to press on through and complete the mission. Lord, I know that as you turn weakness into strength as our greatest fears becomes our greatest blessings. Help me to trust you for a good

outcome in facing fear. My job is to resist and let our hearts not be troubled or afraid. The Holy Spirit will protect me from all fear. God rescues us and is responsible for the increase. We plow, plant, tend, and water, but only God grants the increase. Lord, help me to reject taking credit for good results and to cast my care on you. Lord, I trust you for the increase no matter the circumstances and what I am feeling. God, please keep me in perfect peace. Lord, break the idols of our heart. What a comfort to know that I always possess peace in you, in your presence! The storms of fear will come, but I know that God's presence brings peace in the midst of the internal and external storms. God rescues and keeps me safe when I trust in him.

PRAYER: VICTORY OVER FEAR PRAYER

I thank the Lord that even when one of our fears comes to pass (enter in the fear), God has a plan to overcome and give victory. If we remain true like Job and state yet though he slay me, I will trust him (Job 13:15), the Lord gives and takes away, praise be to the name of the Lord (Job 1:21), that I will not curse God and die (Job 2:9), and I will continue to trust God when we have little strength (Revelation 3:8), God restores what was lost (Joel 2:25–26). These are opportunities to practice more patience, love, grace and peace, and to say, “Peace be unto you” after we have fled. Lord, help me to reflect on Philippians 4:7 to be anxious over nothing. Satan will lie and exaggerate the consequences of realized fear to keep us in bondage. The spilling of the blood of Jesus cleaned up my sins and failures (those I can see, and those of the spirit that I cannot) and allows us to work out our salvation in (eustress) fear and trembling. Lord, use my failures and thorns in the flesh to keep me humble. As Martin Luther spilled wine during his communion service and learned self-grace, help me to practice and grow in silencing the accusing voice. Place all my sins into perspective as the blood covers them. Help me to practice making sacrifices for the greater good. Lord, it is not about my image, my pride, or my success. My past sins and failures are done and let us be going toward the future holding the Lord's hand!

PRAYER: CONTROL ISSUE

Dear Lord, I recognize that my flesh nature desires to control my circumstances to protect my ego, maximize comfort, minimize pain, promote my best interests, and maximize good. Lord, I know that true control can only come by surrendering my will to God. My ability

to yield control to God is an act of love and faith in which I sacrifice self-interest for the larger good. Lord, help me cast out the spirit of divination and the desire to know and control. This spirit rejects faith in God and I cannot accomplish God's purpose for my life if that spirit of control rules. I am unable to grow if I am always attempting to "game the system" and avoid the trials and tests that reveal what is in our hearts. Lord, I know that I cannot understand the complex variables and relationships and how our obedience promotes your will. My definition of success and logic is not the same as yours. I cannot see how the past, present, and future cause and effect relationships, that are the foundation for the eternal, work in my life. Lord, I need to die to the self and give up control! Help me to see with your eyes!

Dear Lord, I recognize that my negative thoughts are like viruses that try to attach, link up, and reproduce to fill me with their toxins of negative emotions and sinful thoughts and behavior. Thank you, Lord, that the Holy Spirit and the Word are the immune systems. They absorb and replace the demonic and flesh-inspired thoughts with your peace. However, when under attack, this produces stress, and an increase in blood pressure. The key is to resist linking with the spiritual virus. When I refuse to link-up and ruminate on the virus, this saps their energy for the attack. Peace follows night as long as we speak words of life over others and ourselves.

CHAPTER 16



PRAYERS: OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

PERSEVERANCE PRAYER

Jesus, please help me to find peace in your presence irrespective of the buffeting of my mind, body, and spirit by the waves. I believe that Jesus will get me safely to the other side of the lake. My heart is like the boat that the disciples used to cross the Sea of Galilee. Help me in the middle of this ocean storm to invite you into my boat. Please forgive me for trying to get to the other side on my own strength, skill, and perseverance. If I could navigate the storm-tossed waters on my own, it would not be faith and I would have already made the journey. With God's Holy Spirit, I am already on the other side, and God will help me endure and grow through the storm, and end the journey on his timing and terms. It matters not whether I arrive with an intact boat, or on a piece of it, or by walking on the water. God will not permit me to be tested or tempted beyond my ability to bear. Thank the Lord that I am exactly where I need to be! Amen.

GRACE IN FAILURE PRAYER

I thank you that my faith in your power has made me well by your grace. Help me to grow faith, not in my own efforts, but in your faith and power. Thank you for helping me walk in peace. When the enemy attacks with guilt, accusations, and condemnation over (enter your problems), help me to plead the blood and state, "So what, Devil? I am free from guilt and condemnation; I am free to fail with grace." When my conscience condemns, you are greater than my conscience even if there is something to it. Your grace rules!

LOVE PRAYERS

Dear Lord, help me never to forget that my greatest weapon in the battle is love. When I respond in love to all assaults, I am always safe and victorious in the Holy Spirit. Your love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8). Love is patient and kind!

OVERCOMING OBSTACLE PRAYERS

Dear Lord, praise God that the storms of life only happen with God's permission to promote his will. Lord, help me to resist the temptation to run and protect myself. Lord, help me to relinquish control. As Pastor Joel Osteen said, help me to be like the eagle and use the storm winds at our back to soar through and above the lightning, winds, and rain. Lord, help me to understand that our storms are opportunities to bless and encourage others. In the apostle Paul's ministry, God used shipwrecks and storms to place Paul where God needed him in order to bless others and teach him important lessons. These storms of life may form, but they will not prosper. I thank you for the impenetrable hedge of protection that surrounds my family and me. Lord, I thank you that no weapon will stop God's plan, and all of these problems are under your feet. God and I are a majority and God will fight the battle, my enemies will become a footstool, problems will become opportunities, weaknesses will become strengths, and confusion will become a learning occasion. Praise the Lord, as I will trust you to vindicate me when my enemies attack!

CONTROLLING OBSESSIVE AND CONDEMNING THOUGHTS PRAYERS

Dear God, help me to stand in faith by resisting and replacing the fiery thought darts of demonic fear and self-accusation, condemnation and shame, by resting and falling asleep in your peace. I cannot fall asleep on my own power. Holy Spirit, please give me the living Word and bring back to remembrance the key truths that I so often learn but quickly forget. I confess and believe that God has given me more powerful truths than any lie and weapon of the devil. The devil will try to focus my attention on what I cannot do, should not be doing, or should be doing better. He is the accuser of the brethren that has been cast down and defeated (Revelation 12:10). Lord, help me to focus and be grateful for where I am now and on what God is doing rather than on my faults, weaknesses, and sins. You are helping me to cast

out the accusing and condemning spirits that taunt me for not making more progress in the healing process. Help me to rest in God's joy, peace, and grace now. We all need a season for the healing process to bear fruit, and that takes longer than we would like. Help me to not compare myself with others or be impatient based upon my desired healing schedule. God's strength is made perfect in my weakness, and I can do infinitely more with a spirit of mercy, forgiveness, and grace. Help me to rest in God's grace in this spiritual chess match, recognizing that Satan will try to neutralize God's truth and cultivate our natural flesh resistance to God's words of wisdom. Praise the Lord, as he has an inexhaustible supply of truth, joy, patience, love, and mercy.

RESTING IN GOD'S PEACE PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to rest and stand in the Lord's peace. Help me to relax and trust God and let him fight the invisible spiritual enemy with his peace (eustress drives out stress). Lord, I thank you for blessing me with the ability to continually rest and abide in your peace. Thank you, Lord, that there is nowhere for me to escape from your presence. I am thankful that my peace does not depend on my efforts. Peace is a fruit of the Trinity. A mind focused on God and resting in the Holy Spirit has perfect peace. Jesus gives us peace; his peace he gives to me. Help me to rest in the Holy Spirit and I thank you for the peace that blesses others and guards our hearts. Jesus has given us peace and my job is to surrender and replace my fears with his peace by letting my heart not be troubled or afraid.

PRAYERS FOR PROTECTION THROUGH PATIENCE

Dear Lord, help me to fight fear with patience and rest in the one-step victories. Lord, help me to reject the lie of the enemy that my ongoing temptations related to my feelings, thoughts, and emotions are signs that I am not making progress and am far behind where I should be. These lies of guilt, shame, and condemnation are forms of pride that impede our learning and healing. As Scripture states, in our patience we possess our souls (Luke 21:19). Love is patient with self and others. Lord, help me cast out my performance fear, a form of pride based upon vainglory and the fear of man. Help me to reject the need to prove that I am better than others. I pray for a spirit of humility. I pray for humble boldness. Help me to speak with the authority of God in my position, resting in the Lord for the outcome. God has called and equipped me to perform my job for his glory. Help me to remember

how the Lord has delivered and protected me in the past. He protected me then, and he will protect me again.

PRAYER: OVERCOMING TRIALS

Dear Lord, help me to trust you and you alone in times of trial. It is not by science, nor doctor's reports or studies, but only by my Spirit, says the Lord. Human wisdom is a gift from God, but it has limits. Help me not to fear the evil tidings related to news articles or research studies as humans are fallible and you are not.

PRAYER: OVERCOMING ILLNESS

Dear Lord, help me to rest in your peace in the midst of illness. Self-effort cannot change this situation. My faith alone cannot change this situation. Only by faith in agreement with your will can this mountain be moved. Lord, I have faith for healing, but it will not happen without God's power and will. Help me to continue to fight the enemy. Do not let this weakness deter me from fulfilling my purpose in Christ. Help me to confront this fear and be patient when resting in the assurance that this illness does not change my identity and nature in Christ. Help me to rest in your promises and become aware of how my mind, body, and spirit are responding and reacting. Help me to discern disconnection from the vine and take time to engage with God by relaxing, taking a walk, or listening to praise music. The best way to fight this illness is to rest in God's love, patience, and peace and use it as the ultimate weapon. I know and believe that you will heal or protect me from this poison and the negative effects of this illness and produce good fruit in my life. Thank you, Lord, that you always help me cope, protect, and heal. This weapon formed will not prosper (Isaiah 54:17)!

PRAYING WITH THE CORRECT ATTITUDE, PART I

Dear Lord, help me to use prayer in a God-honoring fashion. Help me to reject viewing prayer as an instrument simply to meet a need. Prayer is not about answering our requests or experiencing peace and the fruits of the spirit. The primary motive in prayer is not to receive benefits, it is simply to love, worship, and connect with God, to be with him in relationship and presence. Lord, help me to recognize when I am engaging in instrumental prayer providing openings for the flesh and the enemy. Your peace and outcome is the fruit. Your presence is sufficient!

PRAYING WITH THE CORRECT ATTITUDE, PART II

Dear God, help me to “pray ahead” to gain wisdom and strength in my areas of weakness. Help me to recognize that God often does not change the situation, but he does work in our heart and transform our response. Help me, Holy Spirit, to seek the Scripture verse that has the most power to speak to my situation. Thank you, Lord, that you forgive all my sins (add your specific sin) and heal all of your diseases (add your sickness). I thank you, Lord that you will heal me, provide the antidote, or carry me through in spite of the problem to complete the mission. No weapon formed against me will prosper!

PRAYER FOR PROTECTION

Dear Lord, I thank you for your absolute promises of protection in this situation. No weapon formed against me will prosper. As with Jesus and Pilate (John 19: 10–11), the enemy never receives power over me unless it comes from God to fulfill his purpose and calling. Even then, God will use the attack to produce good in my life and that of others. Every attack of the enemy will pass on by as I am covered by the blood of the lamb. I thank you, Lord, that your plans are always better than mine, and these attacks and problems are developing and refining our character and making us stronger and more like Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for birthing Romans 8:28, Genesis 50:20, and Revelation 3:8 in my life, for strength from weakness, for protection in the storm, and for fulfilling my purpose and calling. Lord, when I sin, I impede you from completing my purpose and calling. True freedom is not perfection, as we all will sin and fall, but quickly recognizing and repenting. God’s strength works through my weakness and I reject self-sufficiency. Lord, help me to possess confidence that I can be and feel vulnerable, but I am strong in Christ, I can feel and be weak, but I am strong in Christ. Night and day are the same for God, and when we rest in Christ, we take on his nature, his core of peace, his protection for us in our dark times, and we become an image of Christ to others. Lord, help me build my house on your foundation. Lord, when the wind, rain, and floods come my house it may shake and have a few leaks, but my house stands! When we sin and believe the lies of the enemy, we know that there are consequences, but God’s forgiveness, grace, love, and protection rule and cover my sins. God’s discipline is always good for us, and God uses the negative consequences as part of our learning process. Thank you Lord that I have more faith in God’s promises of life, healing, and

protection than I do in the devil's fear threats of destruction. Help me to have more faith in the Lord's Kingdom investment promises than the devil's gambling. God remembers my sins of fear and doubt no more. I will ask him to remember my faith, trust, and love through Christ. I thank you that Jesus takes away my sin, and then lovingly grants what I need to prosper. Satan will always try to sow doubt, but help me to keep my eyes on you!

PRAYERS FOR CASTING OUR CARE ON GOD

Dear Lord, thank you for assuming the "heavy lifting," as your yoke is easy and your burden is light. My job is to trust, believe, and surrender to you, while you are responsible for the outcome. Lord, I recognize that when I become outcome-focused, it creates within me a work mentality, a spirit of pride, and a jealousy competitive and comparative spirit. Conversely, when I trust and believe you for the outcome, it allows God's peace and presence to rule and cast out fear. I am doing my job if I trust you when I am fearful, when God stretches my faith to the breaking point, when I make mistakes and fail, then I succeed through your power.

PRAYERS FOR AVOIDING DECEPTION

Dear Lord, help me to recognize when the enemy is using his schemes and plans to deceive me. The enemy will reveal partial truth, and I know that whatever Satan is saying, he is a liar and a thief whose purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy.

PRAYERS OF FAITH

Dear Lord, help me to learn from Paul and Silas when they were in prison (Acts 16:16–40). When the enemy attacks, help us to place more confidence in the Word than in the power of the circumstances. I am confident that God will override the devil's power to cripple us. The Bible tells me the truth so I know the end from the beginning.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

The foundation of our witness resides within the beauty and joy produced by a personal transformational relationship with Jesus Christ. Wherever we are on our spiritual journey, the closer we come to Jesus, the more clearly truth is revealed in our lives. Only Jesus can meet our needs to achieve perfect transcendence and purpose. Jesus meets us

wherever we are on our present faith journey. Whether your coworker is an atheist, an agnostic, a deist, or a born-again believer, a genuine encounter with the Lord is the ultimate transformational experience. Many Christian beliefs appear to be foolish on an empirical level, but doubts are gradually or suddenly replaced with faith as we personally experience the power and peace of an intensively personal savior. If you want this relationship, please pray the following prayer with me:

Jesus, I confess my need for you. I am at a dead end when it comes to options. I know that I am imperfect person, that being a “good” person is not enough, and that I am a sinner. I am not even sure that you exist, but my heart knows that I cannot achieve peace or joy based upon my own efforts. Please come into my life, and show me that you are real. Please forgive me for my sins, and be the Lord of my life. Lord, grant unto me the faith to believe in spite of my intellectual and emotional doubts and confusion. Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief. Thank you for your mercy and grace, and for filling me with the hope of a transformed life. Lord, reveal yourself to me in a mighty way. Lord, please be my savior, teacher, counselor, and comforter, and immerse me in your unconditional love.

CHAPTER 17



REFLECTIONS ON SERVANT LEADER CHARACTER: MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

In this concluding chapter, I would like to provide a final framework for cultivating ongoing growth as a servant leader. The first element is to renew our commitment to God every day. The key is to recognize that the only means for long-term change and growth is to receive a never-ending supply of God's saving, healing, and empowering grace. When our focus centers on "my" effort, "my" work, "my" accomplishments, we fail to recognize the Holy Spirit is the source of the power, strength, and energy to make lasting change in others and ourselves. As servant leaders, our first commitment is to maintain the vertical relationship with God so we have the strength and power to serve and love others around us. From a practical standpoint, this entails an intentionality of mind, body, and spirit that recognizes the source and nature of our strengths and weaknesses. Hence, we commit every day a tithe of time, or ten percent of our waking hours, to activities explicitly devoted to cultivating our relationship to God. This would include Bible reading, prayer, meditation, or simple quiet time. The principle is not a legalistic ritual, but a dynamic expression of our love and dependence on God. We also should strive to dedicate the "best" times of our day according to our unique biological clock. During this time, seek the Lord's guidance on how to prioritize our time. Always remember that when we embrace God's plan and agenda, we tap into the supernatural realm of power exponentially increasing our efficiency and effectiveness.

The second key principle is to practice conscious commitment to “pray without ceasing.” This is a very difficult spiritual discipline, but the goal is to practice ongoing mindfulness of God’s dominion, presence and activity as we carry out all of our daily activities. Hence, this does not entail continuous prayer, but an ongoing awareness of our need to communicate with God in the internal dialogue of the mind. Hence, we engage in periodic breaks with a mental focus on God by engaging in a variety of communication strategies including prayer, meditation on a Scripture passage, reflecting on a blessing, and asking for wisdom on how better serve others in the workplace. When we commit to drawing closer to God, he draws closer to us (James 4:8). When we strive to hear God’s voice on a daily basis, our spiritual senses are more finely tuned. This level of spiritual fitness is absolutely essential for the inevitable stress, conflict, and hectic activity levels in the workplace. When we are engaged in these battles, our conscious focus and awareness of God is reduced, but our internal subconscious spiritual communication is not. The more that we reach out to God, the more his Holy Spirit will communicate directly to the Father to provide us wisdom, guidance, and reassurance even in the fog and noise of battle. In essence, we are blessed with a spiritual peace in the midst of the storm. A clear statement of this in Romans 8:26, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” Hence, God is promoting our best interests even when we are too distracted for conscious thought!

A third ongoing practice is to engage in ongoing contemplation and self-reflection on how to grow and improve in character, faith, and competence. This entails an ongoing commitment to the truth grounded upon a solid foundation of our servant leader calling and identity. We must reinforce that our calling and gifts are irrevocable (Romans 11:29), and that godly excellence is not perfection, but a commitment to grow in love, learning from our mistakes, and expressing gratitude for our success. We need each day to invest time on reflecting on the successes and failures, and ask God for three important outcomes: (1) insight and wisdom on our motivation and the consequences of our actions, (2) clarity regarding the main learning points and principles, and (3) how we should respond. The best means for reflecting and learning entails maintaining a journal of observations and lessons learned. This can assume a variety of forms including a daily log and summary, or, as I practice, periodic entries that I study, review, and reflect upon at least once per week. I make entries into my journal as led by the Lord. Sometimes this entails multiple entries per day,

while at other times I may go several days to a week with no entries. Adopt a system that works best for you. The Lord will use the time and study to reinforce key principles and provide fresh insight and wisdom. I spend at least one hour per week in praying and reviewing past entries. God will speak to you and provide great nuggets of wisdom.

Let me provide a final example. I had the honor of serving as Interim Dean of the School of Government at Regent University, as I previously noted. It was challenging and tumultuous at times, and there were several instances when I was overwhelmed and wanted to quit. One of the ways that God encouraged me was to review my journal entries as the Lord spoke to me about my perfectionism. As a professor I had a much higher degree of control over my job duties, hence it was easier to “game the system” and avoid situations in which I was fearful of failing. As dean, I was responsible for the “ship of state,” and there were duties I had to complete irrespective of my comfort or ability levels. I learned that it was “okay” to fail, make mistakes and still move forward and complete the job. Below is an entry from my journal that reflects the insight and comfort I received from the Lord:

Praise God, the Lord is reinforcing that as with our nation, we must exercise repentance with grace and patience as we are works in progress, imperfectly implementing the mission, vision, values, morals and ideals we espouse. Our country had slavery at the beginning in spite of the Declaration of Independence stating that all men are created equal and the protections of the Constitution. We all have areas of bondage, sins, and weaknesses that will require a civil war or civil rights movement to eradicate. We must embrace a God-honoring perspective of grace, do not need to be perfect for principles to be true, for the country to exist and move forward, to realize our calling and purpose, as they are always imperfectly realized. As you do not reject the United States because of its imperfections in realizing its values, you must reject hard-hearted rejection based upon flawed implementation and the presence of hypocrisy in your work. God’s purpose and calling is still being realized in our weakness, sin, and imperfections. God has made allowance for failure, limits, sin, doubt, unbelief, fear, and weakness. All God asks is that we confess, repent, and renounce on a regular basis. He loves us as we are, but not satisfied!

As I reflected on this journal entry, I am comforted today regarding my shortcoming while being encouraged to “step out of the boat!”

Christian servant leader character is the evidence and the fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Christian servant leader character is the reproduction of the life of Christ, and is one of our most precious possessions. Character enables us to realize our

God-given potential, overcome obstacles, and complete the mission and purpose God ordained before the foundation of the world. Christian servant leader character requires a lifelong commitment and recognition that it is not how we begin that matters, but how we finish the good work the Lord began in us. One of the great challenges is to live in the now, the precious present, while learning from the past and planning for the future with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Another key character element is humility, recognizing that as we mature in character, there is an equivalent increase in the level of accountability for our actions. We become role models for others, and if pride corrupts our actions, our failures are magnified, given their influence on the faith of other Christians and the ammunition provided to unbelievers to further discredit our specific witness and that of Christians in general.

It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will speak to you to increase your knowledge, motivation, and perseverance in your own “good fight.” The enemy of our souls will never retreat, and we must rest in God’s power and grace to carry the battle and resist the evil, knowing that ultimately, victory—both individually and corporately—is certain. My closing prayer is that you will always rest in the Lord’s peace and grace and receive his ongoing favor to bring glory to God’s Kingdom as you practice servant leadership in all life areas. Keep up your well doing!

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