

# Practical Ministry Skills:

# Healthy Leadership

	<b>Contents</b>	PAGE
	LEADER'S GUIDE.....	2
	<b>Separate Your Work from Your Relationship with God</b>	
	FIND YOUR JOY IN GOD <i>by Brandon Hudson</i> .....	3
	KEEP YOUR PASSION FOR CHRIST ALIVE <i>by John Wentz</i> .....	5
	WHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST IS ENTWINED WITH YOUR MINISTRY <i>by Seth Widner</i> .....	8
	<b>Holistic Health</b>	
	EMOTIONAL STABILITY <i>interview with Peter Scazzero</i> .....	11
	EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LEADERSHIP <i>by Peri Gilbert</i> .....	14
	BEYOND SPIRITUAL HEALTH <i>interview with Pete Briscoe</i> .....	17
CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS <i>by Alan Danielson</i> .....	20	
ENVY: A TEMPTATION OF LEADERSHIP <i>by Marlena Graves</i> .....	22	
A SEAWORTHY LEADER <i>by Bert Crabbe</i> .....	24	
LEARN TO REST FROM MINISTRY <i>by Seth Widner</i> .....	27	
<b>Resources</b>		
FURTHER EXPLORATION.....	30	

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

**How to Use This Resource**

*Take a quick peek here to maximize the content in this training download.*

Small-group ministry is far too important to be led by unhealthy, burned out leaders. Whether you're a volunteer leader or a paid staff member, you need to ensure that you're a healthy leader. This resource is for any and all leaders in small-group ministry—from the pastor to the coach to the small-group leader.

**Separate Your Work from Your Relationship with God**

One of the difficulties of church leadership is not allowing our relationship with God to be affected by our ministry. It seems like they'd go hand-in-hand well, but too often we let our ministry successes or failures affect our relationship with God, or, on the other hand, confusing a vibrant ministry for a vibrant relationship with God. These three articles will help you keep the right balance.

**Holistic Health**

Too often when we think about leader health, we're only referring to spiritual health, but our leadership also requires emotional, mental, and physical health. Peter Scazzero and Peri Gilbert talk about the importance of emotional health in leadership. Then "Beyond Spiritual Health" discusses physical health in relation to leadership health. Alan Danielson and Marlena Graves explain how to have healthy thoughts, and then Bert Crabbe and Seth Widner discuss setting aside Sabbath rest each week.

—AMY JACKSON is Managing Editor of SmallGroups.com.

Need more material or training on another small-groups ministry topic? See our website at [www.SmallGroups.com](http://www.SmallGroups.com).

To contact the editors:

E-mail [SmallGroups@christianitytoday.com](mailto:SmallGroups@christianitytoday.com)

Mail SMALLGROUPS.COM, Christianity Today  
465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188



**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

**Find Your Joy in God**

*Not in your work for him*

By Brandon Hudson

A few years back, I decided it was time to act. I was in seminary, daily hearing the call to go and take the gospel to the cities and the nations, and I finally decided it was time. I began making contacts in a city I felt God was leading me to, and my wife and I made a couple of trips out there to try to picture life and ministry in this great city. We met with pastors and even went through interviews with local churches. I was fervently running hard after the mission of God, chasing the dream of building his kingdom among the unreached.

And the whole time I was growing colder in my relationship with Christ and my family.

**What's Most Important**

Luke records a time when Jesus went over to the house of two women, Mary and Martha. We are told that Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, listening to his teaching while Martha busies herself with preparing the house. Martha gets annoyed with her sister's inactivity and complains to Jesus, "Don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40).

Jesus responds, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but . . . Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (10:41).

It hit me: I was Martha. My joy had shifted from my relationship *with* God to my work *for* God. I had grown discontent with certain areas of my job and my relationship with God felt cold. I saw serving God by moving to a new city as a way to get the excitement and fulfillment I was looking for: a new place, a cool city, an unreached people, and churches that could use my experience and knowledge. I was passionate, but it was passion for the work of Christ—not my relationship with Christ.

God designed us to enjoy his mission and his work, but he never intended it to become a substitute for himself. John Piper once [described](#) the need to enjoy Christ above all else saying, "Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. And people who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there, will not be there. The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it is a way to get people to God. It's a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God. If we don't want God above all things, we have not been converted by the gospel."

Psalm 73:25–26 says, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." The psalmist is saying that we must keep in mind that God is the goal of our salvation. It's out of our delight in him that we desire to serve him and share with others. And even though we are to delight in him, we are prone to delight in our ministry effectiveness instead.

**What Your People Need Most**

In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul instructs church leaders to "watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." In other words, the greatest thing you can do for the people you lead is to keep watch over your own relationship with Christ. Similar messages are throughout the Bible. Proverbs tells us to guard our hearts because everything else flows from them (Proverbs 4:23), and Christ himself told us that our mouths speak what's in our hearts (Matthew 12:34). As we seek to guide people to the Spring of Life, we must be sure that we're already there drinking from it ourselves. Only then will we be able to lead others.

More than a great orator, more than someone who's around all of the time, more than a leadership expert, your people desperately need you to be leading out of your own vibrant and healthy relationship with Christ. Your primary focus needs to be on the fruit of the Spirit, not the gifts of the Spirit. Who you are is much more important than what you do.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

### Taking Inventory

Additionally, we see in Martha's story that hard-working, motivated, get-things-done people especially need to guard themselves and keep watch on where their satisfaction is coming from. I heard a story once about a college student notorious for his reputation with women. During his early college years, he slept with as many girls as he could. For him, it was about the conquest, the power he had. Eventually, through a series of relationships, this college student came to Christ. But he didn't just attend the campus ministry meetings. Instead, he joined the leadership team at the ministry and at the local church. If there was an event at either, he was there. Rather than be a Christian "partway," he threw everything—and every moment—he had into it. People surrounding him began to notice this pattern and had a realization: the same young man who was interested in the conquest of women had simply changed his conquest to doing for Christ. Though God was at work in his life, his heart needed to be transformed. He simply was playing out the same patterns with new goals.

Success for someone in ministry is uniquely associated to God's success in the advancement of his kingdom. It's more difficult to distinguish between my work and God's work—and my glory and God's glory—than it is in the rest of the work we do on a daily basis. To keep yourself in check, and to make sure that you're keeping the focus of your ministry on Christ, ask yourself these questions on a regular basis:

- How would you feel if God chose to bless and use another church/ministry/small group in your area more significantly than yours?
- Do you find yourself being regularly critical of group members, fellow leaders, or other ministry leaders?
- How do ministry successes and failures affect your relationship with God?
- How is your prayer life?
- Do you often feel like you aren't getting enough credit for your ministry work and successes?
- Do you live in anxiety and busyness over your ministry work, or are you able to experience freedom as you leave the results and fruit of your labor to God?
- Are you working to grow the fruit of the Spirit in your life, or are you more focused on the gifts of the Spirit?

Continually asking these questions of yourself can help you keep watch over your heart and your motivations in ministry. The reality is that you may be able to sustain a successful ministry apart from Christ for a while, even years, without even those closest to you knowing you are operating in your own strength and dying inside. But eventually the walls will crumble. You won't be able to keep it up. There will be a lapse. Perhaps you'll lash out at someone or fall into sin. Regardless, you will eventually fall.

Abraham Kuyper said, "Phariseeism is like a shadow—it can be deepest and sharpest closest to the light." Christian ministry can be a blessing and a curse. It's a thrill to be used by God to advance his kingdom and heal broken people, cities, and nations through the power of the gospel. The danger is that we often allow the gospel to transform everything around us without ever allowing it to fully change our own heart. God is the goal of the gospel. Fight hard to find your joy in Christ alone, and allow your ministry to be the *result* of your joy—not the source.

— BRANDON HUDSON is the pastor of student small groups at The Summit Church in North Carolina; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. When have been more like Martha than Mary? Why do you think you acted that way?
2. Overall, how did you respond to the questions in the article? Are you at danger for making your ministry an idol?
3. What one or two steps can you take this week to return your focus to Christ rather than your work for him?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

## **Keep Your Passion for Christ Alive**

*How to avoid making your work for God an idol*

By John Wentz

It's very easy in the course of ministry to get so focused on what you do that you forget who you are. I've found myself going through the motions of ministry and losing contact with God more than once. We strategize, learn, write, meet, and before we know it, our prayer time (if present) consists of praying only for what needs to get done. Slowly we begin to serve a different lord than the One who longs to commune with us.

In [\*The Spiritual Danger of Doing Good\*](#), Peter Greer quotes a [study](#) that says only one third of those who serve God in the Bible actually remain faithful to God in the end. That statistic is staggering and, unfortunately, might actually be accurate in today's world as well.

There are lots of sobering reminders throughout Scripture that remind us to remain faithful in the midst of our service to Christ. Revelation 2 points out the failure of leaving our first love, even if we've persevered hardships in Christ's name. And Jesus himself tells us that not everyone who calls him Lord will enter the kingdom in Matthew 7. Likewise, in John 15, Jesus says that unless we are abiding in him, we can accomplish nothing.

Despite the warnings of these passages, it still happens. We still end up making an idol out of ministry. We never intend to lose ourselves while serving God. We know we need to remain faithful. Yet we can easily slip into the trap of serving Christ without a passionate relationship with him.

Here are a few things we can do to make sure we don't make an idol out of ministry:

### **1. Watch your life and your doctrine closely.**

1 Timothy 4:16

There was a point in my ministry when I realized I cared more about being recognized as a spiritual leader than I did about being real before God. Vanity had crept in. The antibiotic for vanity is humble confession. When was the last time you confessed your sin to God? And more importantly, when was the last time you confessed your sin to someone else and received prayer? A wise mentor once told me that at all times we should have at least one friend who knows everything about us. When you're in ministry, this is critical. Find someone outside of your church context to whom you can safely confess your sins. He who is forgiven much loves much. When we go through the pain of confession we remember our need for the savior who died for us, and we experience the life-giving flow of grace. There is a sorrow that leads to life. It's the sorrow that leads to confessing and admitting our need for God.

### **2. Try a new or different discipline.**

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

Gary Thomas in his book *Sacred Pathways* explains several different ways that people are wired up to connect with God. The idea is this: If we try to treat a dry soul with a generic prescription of having quiet time without recognizing our unique spiritual personality, we might find ourselves doing a lot of spiritual activity but not experiencing the presence of God. So rather than simply spend time with God in the ways that others have told you about, find ways that help you connect with God. If you've never fasted or spent a day in silence, it can be an incredible experience. Or consider the discipline of simplicity and purge your closet or choose to only wear a few items of clothing for a season. Give generously to someone in secret. Spend time in the quiet of nature to experience God's presence. Experiment and find new ways to experience God.

### **3. Take time to clarify your sense of destiny.**

Philippians 1:21–26

Men and women with a growing sense of destiny tend to remain faithful to God throughout the entirety of their life. How do you develop a sense of destiny? People usually develop clarity throughout their life when they take time to seek God in creative ways. A sense of destiny develops through multiple experiences when a leader realizes that God has created and called them for special purposes.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

The ancient spiritual practice of pilgrimage is one way that has served to develop a sense of destiny because it created an intentional, extended time of solitude, fasting, and retreat from regular activity. Going on pilgrimage with others provided the perspective needed to reflect on life and realign what was most important.

In an effort to develop a sense of destiny for our family, my wife, 10-year-old son, and I recently took a trip with Vision Trust International to Guatemala. I will never forget when my son and I told Fredy (another 10-year-old boy) that we had agreed to be his sponsors. Fredy jumped into my arms and then pulled back to look me in the eyes. Those five seconds of Fredy's grateful soul gaze solidified a sense of destiny that we'll never forget. In our week-long pilgrimage to learn what God was doing in Guatemala, we had made a lifelong friend and deepened our own sense of destiny. In another two-week pilgrimage to Venezuela with my wife and 12-year-old son, my son developed a sense of destiny to help plant a church when he gets older. This sense of purpose even at a young age helps shape his decisions and clarify his life mission.

### 4. Connect with someone outside of your tribe.

Philippians 2:19–30

It can be incredibly refreshing to hear someone who celebrates God in a completely different way than you talk about his or her relationship with God. Taking time to connect with a monk, priest, or someone from a different denomination can provide variety to your spiritual diet. Attending a church from a different background, or attending a conference from a different Christian stream can introduce unique insights into your relationship with Christ. Consider reading some of the ancient church fathers and mothers (such as John Cassian, Julian of Norwich, or any of the desert fathers or mothers). You may not agree theologically 100 percent of the time with those outside your tribe, but it may introduce angles and perspectives that you have never considered, and that can result in spiritual growth. You may just find a new mentor in a seventh century monk who seems to be speaking to your soul!

### 5. Don't confuse your spiritual gas tank with your physical gas tank.

Exodus 20:8

Perhaps you've heard the advice that there are times when the most spiritual activity we can do is take a nap. It's amazing how refreshing it can be to take a break and simply relax. Times of rest, exercise, and nutritional renewal can be the catalyst to a sense of personal revival. We can easily confuse being exhausted physically with feeling overwhelmed spiritually. Getting permission to take a nap or take an extra day off to refresh is part of how God wired us. Unfortunately, we've lost track of a sense of Sabbath in many arenas of the church. We have to relearn how to rest.

At COMMUNITY, we encourage all of our staff to practice three rhythms of rest: devote daily, withdraw weekly, and retreat regularly. We aren't perfect at practicing these rhythms, and it can be difficult when you have a weekend full of church activity. However, we have to find the space we need each week to release our ministry activity into God's hands. Letting go is a reminder that it's God's work after all. For added accountability, find someone who will check in with you regularly to make sure that you are resting.

### 6. Do what you know is true.

Philippians 3:16

Spiritual renewal isn't always found in something *new*, but in what we know to be *true*. Paul says to "Live up to the truth we have already attained." Take a moment to evaluate your passion for Christ and ask yourself, "What are all the areas of my life that I can think of where I know I should be thinking or acting differently?" Make a full list. These unattended loose strings in our soul can burn in the background of our mind like a low-grade fever. This sense of discontent might not be a raging fever that shuts us down, but rather a nagging sense that something isn't quite right. Making a list can clarify the things in our life that need to be addressed. There might be relationship grudges, unfulfilled generosity, or a postponed conversation that needs to be attended to before you can fully serve God in ministry.

Remember that God cares as much about *who* you are as *what* you do for him. Live this out and you will set a great example for those who you serve.

## **HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

—JOHN WENTZ serves as Small Group Champion for all 14 campuses of Community Christian Church, and as the Small Group Director for their Yellow Box Campus in Naperville, Illinois; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.

### **Discuss**

1. Do you truly believe that God cares as much about who you are as what you do for him? Why or why not?
2. Which of these six steps stand out to you as something you should do? Why?
3. What one or two things will you do this week to ensure your ministry is not an idol?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

## **When Your Relationship with Christ Is Entwined with Your Ministry**

*5 steps to get back on track*

By Seth Widner

I love ministry! When my eyes open in the morning, I can't wait to help people follow Christ. As I labor throughout the day, I feel like I'm accomplishing significant tasks. Whether I'm studying for a sermon, visiting a church member in the hospital, coaching a small-group leader, or helping a new member find a small group, I feel alive when I'm serving others. After almost two decades of being a pastor, I still love my job. And I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Seven years ago, I helped launch our church in Northeast Florida. Because church planting was a new experience for me, I was learning new things daily. This was one of the most exciting seasons of ministry for me. Within the first six months, we were averaging 500 people in weekly attendance. It was important to help each person connect so they wouldn't fall through the cracks and leave. So I read and studied books about church growth and small-group dynamics to better help people connect. I read an average of one book per week. My regular ministry tasks didn't slow down, either. The only way I could accomplish everything was by replacing my breaks with reading and studying.

Then, when that still wasn't enough time, I replaced my morning and evening Bible reading with study time. My quiet times of prayer were replaced by making phone calls. Instead of spending time with my family in the evening, I sat at the computer and returned e-mails. Ministry consumed every area of my life. Even if I wasn't directly working on ministry tasks, I was thinking about them.

My work for Christ had replaced my relationship with him, even though it didn't feel that way. After all, the things I was doing felt a little devotional and prayerful. They were *about* Jesus. They just didn't involve him very much.

As this kept up, I became miserable. Due to fatigue, I wasn't at my best in ministry. I kept forgetting things, and I was disorganized. No matter how much I did, it seemed I couldn't keep up. And yet I couldn't stop thinking about ministry.

My wife, Melissa, wasn't happy with me, either. We rarely went on dates, and she felt like she took second place to church work. When she tried to share her feelings with me, I became cranky. It felt like I was losing at work and at home, and the passion I'd had for ministry began to fade.

When we lose our passion for our ministry, we're in a dangerous place. The people around us will pick up on this through our facial expressions, voice tone, and even how we carry ourselves. And our lack of passion will directly affect the success and health of our ministry.

Thankfully, Christ rescued me from my fatigue and confusion. Through rest and the support and advice from trusted friends, I was able to regain my passion for the Lord's work. And that can happen for you, too.

### **Christ's Example in Ministry**

I love the events recorded in Mark 1:21–39. Revival broke out in Capernaum. As Jesus preached the Good News, people were amazed at his teaching. He spoke with passion and authority like nobody they'd heard before. It was as if Jesus personally knew God. As he preached, the people soaked in every word.

Suddenly Christ's sermon came to an abrupt halt when a man stood up in their midst and began to shout toward Jesus. "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus recognized that this man was possessed by a demon, so he commanded, "Be quiet!"

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

Come out of him!" Christ's bold words echoed off the synagogue walls as the demon fled. As the service concluded, the people were amazed.

News spread quickly and many gathered at Peter's home that evening. Every person suffering from a sickness, disease, or demon possession was brought to Jesus. And he healed each one of them, restoring broken hearts, souls, minds, and bodies. By the time every person had been healed, it was late.

As the sun rose early the next day, the disciples woke up to people looking for Jesus. They wanted more time with him. But he was nowhere to be found. So Peter, James, and John went to look for Jesus. Where could he be when their ministry was just starting to take off and the people were desperately asking for him? The disciples frantically searched for Jesus. Where was their leader?

Jesus was spending time with the One that he loved most. Earlier that morning, before the sun rose, he withdrew to a quiet place to pray and enjoy some quiet time with the Father. By getting away from the crowd, Jesus was able to connect with the Father and gain needed direction for his earthly ministry. His relationship with the Father was a higher priority than his ministry. His Father was always first.

### Follow Christ's Example

In the midst of a rapidly growing ministry, Jesus didn't allow his work for the Father to become entwined with his relationship with the Father. Jesus faced more pressure, temptation, opposition, time restraints, and persecution than we do, yet he remained connected to the Father and didn't show symptoms of ministry burnout. We have much to learn from Christ.

Our passion for small-group ministry is a powerful force. It drives us to work hard for Jesus' mission. Although our passion for ministry is a good thing, we must always be aware of its power. If we neglect our relationship with Christ, our passion for ministry can become an obsession or an idol that overtakes our lives. I recommend the following biblical steps that will help you break free from idolizing your ministry and regain your passion for Christ.

**Remember who you are.** Galatians 3:26 says, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." It's so easy to define ourselves by what we do. When we place our identity in what we do, we quickly forget who we really are. But we are children of God. And he loves us dearly. His love is not based upon our performance and the earthly measures we use to gauge our success. God loves us all the time, no matter what.

**Place Christ first.** Our ministries must flow from our relationship with Jesus. Before making any plans or trying to invest in small-group leaders, we must hang out with the One who loves us most. After all, he tells us to "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). I recommend starting your day off by connecting with Christ. Read Scripture and pray before the pressures of the day unfold. Seek his guidance. If you don't currently have the time to connect with Christ first thing in the morning, get up just 15 minutes earlier. It's a practice worth your time! Depending on your schedule, a morning quiet time may not work. In that case, you'll need to set a consistent time during the day that you'll spend time with Christ. But make sure to guard it! Once the day has started, it's a lot harder to guard that quiet time.

**Keep Christ first.** Guard your quiet time with Christ. Don't allow anything to come between you and Jesus. Take time out and intentionally turn off your phone and your e-mail notifications and spend some undistracted time with him. Set aside time during your day and week when you won't do anything ministry related. Communicate your schedule to those in your ministry so that you can guard that time. Make sure that your passion for Jesus is greater than your passion for working for him, that you're loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind—not your ministry for him (Matthew 22:37).

**Acknowledge Christ's presence in the midst of ministry.** As you pursue your daily work for Christ, include him in everything you do. If you're coaching a small-group leader, be sure to include Scripture in your advice. If you're preparing to train or recruit small-group leaders, seek Christ's wisdom. Proverbs 2:6 says, "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." When you acknowledge Christ's presence as you work for him, it will ensure that you don't get lost in the work. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Then you'll be working with him, rather than simply for him.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

**Rest from ministry.** If you're experiencing ongoing fatigue, you may be experiencing ministry burnout, which will make incorporating these steps difficult. If this is the case, plan an immediate sabbatical. Get away from the burdens and pressures of the day. Ideally, it's great to have two or three days away from work and ministry to rest and invest in your relationship with Christ. This allows you to ease out of ministry and work worries long enough to refocus. Setting aside even a day, though, can make a big difference. Alternatively, you may simply take a week or two break from your ministry responsibilities. For instance, you may have someone else lead your group for a week or two so you can rest, or you might take a week break from your coaching appointments. Although it may be difficult to slow down, force yourself to do so. At some point during your sabbatical, begin practicing the above steps. You'll find them much easier to accomplish once you have enjoyed some rest.

—SETH WIDNER served as the small-group pastor of The Journey church and is the founder of i58revolution, an organization that supports healthy families; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. How has your relationship with Christ become entwined with the ministry you're doing for him?
2. How might reflecting on your identity in Christ bring renewal to your relationship with him?
3. Are you in need of a break from ministry? Why or why not? If so, how will you accomplish this?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

**Emotional Stability**

*Leaders must be willing to examine their inner life.*

Interview with Peter Scazzero

Peter Scazzero stands on the steps outside New Life Fellowship in New York City swilling coffee between services. Queens Boulevard is a sidewalk away, and the people ascending and descending the steps seem to come from every nation under heaven. Scazzero breaks from a conversation momentarily to flag down a passing church member. "Hey, Miao!" he shouts to a woman on the other side of the sea of people. "Good to see you again. Let's talk later!"

This is where the Italian-American, New York-born-and-raised pastor seems most comfortable. But he wasn't always this at ease. Twenty years ago he was in his mid-30s, already pining for retirement, a ministry workaholic in a church rife with conflict.

That's when a series of events led him to what he calls "emotionally healthy spirituality." The new focus revitalized him, his marriage, and his church. Drew Dyck, managing editor of *Leadership Journal*, spoke with Scazzero about his journey and the kinds of practices that led to his transformation.

**Early in your ministry you had some experiences that compelled you to seek emotional health and spiritual transformation. What were they?**

What precipitated my transformation was simple: things were not going well at church or at home. Five or six years after planting New Life and we were growing and people were coming to Christ. But people were not changing deeply. It really showed when there was stress and conflict in the church. It was clear to me that we had a big problem. Initially I looked at everybody else and said, "*They aren't changing!*" We had a lot of people saying they were on fire for Jesus, but they were still arrogant, still proud, still nursing conflicts like they were 12 years old. I thought to myself, *Something's not right here.*

So I started doing everything I could to help them grow: Scripture-teaching, worship, prayer meetings, community-building, spiritual warfare, prophetic ministry, gifts of the Spirit—you name it. We were doing it all, but something was still missing. I wrestled for a few years trying to identify the problem. It was a real wall.

I was exhausted. Then things started to go very wrong in the church. One of the two congregations in our church had a split, and I saw some ugliness in our people, and I felt hurt and betrayed. But I kept my head up, just kept going, kept pastoring. I thought I was being spiritual by keeping composed, but inside I was a mess.

I had been too busy building, leading, reaching people for Christ. Those are all good things, but it didn't leave a lot of time to look inward.

**One of those experiences was an important encounter with your wife. What happened?**

Around this time Geri came to me and just laid it all on the table. She said, "Pete, I'm leaving the church. I can't take any more of this stress, this constant crisis. This church is no longer life to me. It is death."

By this point we had experienced eight years of unrelenting stress. I had brought home constant pressure and tension from church, year after year, and she was done. She said she was tired of living like a single mom. She said my leadership stunk, pointing out that I was unwilling to confront members who needed to be confronted.

It was incredibly painful to hear that, but God used her. So the pain was God's means of transformation. God was trying to get my attention for years, but it took a lot to stop me. I'm a Type-A guy: "make it happen, keep pushing." For God to stop me, and get me to look at my inner life, sadly, it took a ton.

If you are married, your first "neighbor" you are to love is your spouse. I was loving the whole world, and my wife didn't feel loved by me.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

Supposedly I was raising up mothers and fathers of the faith, but I was an emotional infant trying to lead New Life Fellowship. I knew the Bible. I'd gone to seminary. I was gifted. I could preach and lead a church, at least on a certain level. But I was too busy to love.

Geri's confrontation was the push I needed. That was a huge shift. I started thinking that maybe there were some things in me that needed tending to. It wasn't like I hadn't been cultivating my spiritual life before that time. I'm a very disciplined person. I spent a lot of time in Scripture, praying, and doing spiritual disciplines. But it wasn't enough for transformation.

### **Many leaders might think if they were more consistent about prayer and Bible study that their inner lives would flourish. How can that not be enough? What more did you do?**

It wasn't enough. I started going to Christian counseling for the first time. That was very humbling. I didn't even really believe in Christian counseling at the time, much less that I needed it.

I also started reading Henri Nouwen and other writers who were outside the box for me. I began learning about the importance of Lamentations and Psalms. I spent time looking at my family of origin, how it impacted who I am today, how it affected the way I did ministry. As I went on this journey, just looking at my own life, I started to realize I wasn't such a lovely person on the inside. Here I'd been looking at everyone else, thinking they were the ones who needed to change. But I needed to change first.

When Geri called my bluff, basically telling me "you're not practicing what you preach," it was difficult. But out of that crucible of pain we saw the missing link to transformation. We realized we were missing something, and it was destroying us.

That was the beginning of emotional health, emotionally healthy spirituality. It has a lot of components, but the basic idea is this: emotional health and spiritual maturity can't be separated. You cannot be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. For example, if you're not approachable, kind, loving, gentle, warm, it doesn't matter how much Bible you know, how gifted you are. You're not mature spiritually.

### **What's the relationship between emotional health and spiritual health?**

Well, they're not identical, but you cannot be spiritually mature without being emotionally mature. Now defining emotional maturity isn't easy—it has many components to it. It's a little like EQ (emotional intelligence), but it's very different too because it's much deeper and transformative.

It's not learning a bunch of skills to have a better workplace and to get a product. It's about being transformed from the inside out. It's about who you are, deep down, that impacts your relationship with God, with others, with yourself, and the whole created order.

So, for example, at the conferences I do for pastors, we look at family of origin. We do a three-generational genogram and then ask, "How does your past impact who you are in the present?" We also teach things like grieving and loss. How do you deal with loss? How do you process grief? That's an undertaught topic. There's a whole book in the Bible called Lamentations; two-thirds of the Psalms are laments. Jesus was called the "Man of Sorrows." Yet, we don't do grieving. We don't do loss. We do bigger, better, faster.

Emotional health also involves acknowledging limits. We don't do limits well in North American culture. But there's a whole teaching on limits in Scripture, about not crossing the line, like Adam and Eve did. We like to think it's our effort and determination that results in great things for God. But in 1 Corinthians 13, we see the most important aspect of maturity is the *agape* that flows through us, that comes out of our relationship with God. It's the one thing Satan cannot counterfeit.

### **Pastoral Rule of Life**

Communing with God is leading. It's not about being a CEO or an expert in marketing. Not that I'm against those things. They're great gifts. But the folks who are leading our churches need to be like the early church fathers in the second or fifth centuries. Folks like Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, and Augustine. They were theologians. They were monks. They prayed their theology. They didn't just talk about the Trinity; they communed with the Trinity. They were leaders in the church but were also theologians and men of prayer.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

This "Rule of Life" is for the pastoral staff at New Life Fellowship. The purpose of these guidelines is to keep God at the center of everything we do, to seek the "love of Christ" above all else. In a culture that does not respect God's rhythms for life, we seek to live out a balance of prayer, rest, work, and community. We are called to be contemplatives, out of which God calls us to a level of intensity to bring Jesus Christ to our city and world.

1. **Scripture.** Our lives are built on the Word of God. It is our food and primary means of revelation from him. We spend time each day in Scripture, seeking God's face, dwelling in his presence and praying out of his Word.
2. **Silence and Solitude.** We spend at least one full day a month in silence with God. (Each person goes to a place outside their home, whether a beach, a local retreat center, or a park, to be alone with God for the day. The one requirement is not to do the work of church on that day, but to be with God.)
3. **Daily Office.** We pause two to three times a day to spend time in communion with God, preferably with Scripture, silence, meditation, and prayer.
4. **Study.** We are taking steps to keep learning.
5. **Sabbath.** Each week, we set aside a 24-hour period to keep Sabbath to the Lord, structuring our time around four characteristics of biblical Sabbaths: Stop, Rest, Delight, and Contemplate.
6. **Simplicity.** We model percentage giving (using the tithe as a minimal guideline) in giving to God's work here at New Life Fellowship.
7. **Play and Recreation.** We have a life outside of New Life Fellowship for balance and health.
8. **Service and Mission.** A critical issue for healthy service is clear and realistic expectations. Together with our supervisors and the elder board, we regularly update job descriptions and goals in order to meet these challenges.
9. **Care for the Physical Body.** We seek to regularly care for our physical temples through healthy eating habits, consistent exercise, and sufficient amounts of sleep, respecting our God-given limits.
10. **Emotional Health.** We embrace emotionally healthy skills and behaviors that put feet on our theology to love well (1 Corinthians 13).
11. **Family.** We believe in the equal value of God's call to both singleness and marriage. We affirm with Scripture the gift of singleness for leadership (1 Corinthians 7:25–40). We desire high-quality marriages, out of which we are able to minister to others.
12. **Community.** We encourage all staff members to be in relationships with mature people outside New Life Fellowship; these relationships might be with a spiritual director, a mentor, a counselor, or a mature friend, depending on each person's unique needs and season in God.

—PETER SCAZZERO is the author of [Emotionally Healthy Spirituality](#); copyright 2012 by Christianity Today. This article originally appeared in *Leadership Journal*.

### Discuss

1. Why is it important that leaders display healthy spirituality?
2. How open are you to others' honest critiques? Who in your life is able to speak truth to you?
3. Which of the 12 rhythms outlined in the article are missing from your life? How might you begin incorporating them?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

## **Emotionally Healthy Leadership**

*Leading out of health and wholeness*

By Peri Gilbert

It's easy for us to recognize and acknowledge our joy and happiness, but not our pain. Many of us have come to believe the myth that acknowledging our pain means that we are weak. Therefore, we attempt our hand at perfection, covering up the pain, stress, and hurt in our lives. But in order to live free and lead well, we must be aware of our emotional, mental, and spiritual state and be willing to do what's necessary to be healthy.

The first time I truly came face to face with my own unhealthiness, I was embarrassed, sad, and shameful. I discovered, however, there was nothing for which I needed to be embarrassed and ashamed, and I learned how to deal with my sadness. In dealing with my unhealthiness, I found abundant life.

### **Recognizing Our Issues**

The following steps are guidelines to help you recognize unhealthiness in your life:

#### **1. Listen to Others.**

"You're too up and down. It's just not normal." Those were the words my pastor had the nerve to tell me as I sat in his office excited about a ministry opportunity. Of course, I disregarded what he said and told him, "You just don't get me or my joy." Then two months after this conversation, I crashed—emotionally and mentally. I finally had to face the emotional roller coaster ride my pastor could see I was on.

While it was difficult to hear the truth, someone cared enough to tell me the truth. I was surrounded by people who cared about me as well as my ministry and wanted success for both. The same can be true for you. The key is to surround yourself with healthy people and relationships so that when someone says points out a problem, you can trust his or her discernment.

#### **2. Evaluate Yourself.**

If others are coming to you because they've noticed a change in you, maybe it's time to evaluate yourself. Ask yourself questions that will bring you truth. For instance,

- Am I short with people?
- Am I withdrawn (or more withdrawn than usual)?
- What is the state of my relationships right now?
- How is my stress level?
- Am I procrastinating on anything?
- What is my motivation for ministry right now?

Don't be afraid to take a hard look at yourself. This is a time of reflection that can move to a time of healing.

#### **3. Stop Ignoring the Pain.**

If we exhibit signs of a heart attack, we're quick to find an ER and rectify the problem. Why? Because we want to live. Yet when our heart hurts or our lives are in shambles, we often want to sit back and excuse the pain, allowing it to rob us of life. That is not how God intended us to live.

In order for you to live the abundant life God has called you to live, you must acknowledge the hurt you're facing. Dr. Henry Cloud states in *Changes that Heal*, "As long as the false self is relating to God, others, and ourselves, then God's grace and truth cannot heal us." The more you try to ignore it, the worse the pain becomes. When you are hurting, acknowledge that hurt. In acknowledging the hurt, anger, or other emotions, you give yourself an opportunity to find healing.

#### **4. Stop Pretending.**

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

Lysa Terkeurst in her book *Unglued* notes, “Raw emotions—anger, frustration, bitterness, resentment—are the feelings we tend to hide from people we want to impress, but spew on those we love most.” The longer we pretend we’re perfect, the more we’ll sink into unhealthy patterns of relating with others because we simply can’t keep up the façade. Pretending gets us nowhere. The problem and pain are still there. On top of that, pretending is exhausting.

A good reminder when we’re tempted to appear perfect comes from John Ortberg’s *The Me I Want to Be*: “You are not *your* handiwork; your life is not your project. Your life is God’s project.” If we want to flourish as God desires us to, we must be who God created us to be.

### Steps to Healing

Recognizing that you are in unhealthy place is the first step to healing. The next step is getting help. The following options are not exhaustive, but they can help you begin your journey:

#### 1. Allow Yourself to Feel.

One of the greatest lies of this world is that it’s wrong to experience certain feelings. We’ve been told it’s unhealthy to experience anger, sadness, or disappointment. And this myth perpetuates when we tell one another to simply “get over it,” that everything will be fine with God, or that anger is a sin.

But, as Dr. Henry Cloud observes in *Changes that Heal*, “Feelings signal our state of being. . . . To disown our feelings, to ignore responsibility for them, is one of the most destructive things we can do to both ourselves and others.”

In order for us to begin to work toward health, we must acknowledge the truth of what we feel and give ourselves permission to feel. It’s never wrong to allow ourselves to feel. And as we acknowledge what’s happening with us, we take a step toward healing.

#### 2. Be Real with God.

This can be an incredibly difficult thing to do. We want to see ourselves as perfect, as people who are getting better over time, and who are becoming holy as God is holy. But in doing so, we place demands on ourselves that not even God places on us. In fact, the very weaknesses we try so hard to cover up and run from, is what God wants to use for his glory (2 Corinthians 12:9). God is not afraid of our pain, hurt, or struggles. In fact, he wants to help us through them and encourages us to rely on him as we travel through life.

#### 3. Consider Counseling.

For whatever reason, there is often a stigma that comes with meeting with a counselor. But there is no reason not to seek help from a professional as we seek health. As you come to know yourself and your emotions more, you may need guidance on practical steps to help you cope with ongoing issues or practical steps to help you move forward in your healing. Consider talking to a licensed professional counselor, especially one that is a Christian. You may also find a pastor who is trained in this area, or you can ask your pastor for recommendations of counselors. Just as you would take your physical health seriously to ensure a long life with your family, take your mental, emotional, and spiritual health seriously.

#### 4. Seek Out Accountability.

It’s not easy to share our burdens with others, yet God encourages us to do so (Galatians 6:2; 2 Corinthians 1:4–6). This is a critical step in your journey to a healthy place as well as maintaining your mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

After I had finally reached a place of health, I knew I needed help staying on track. I asked a friend, someone I felt safe with and could trust, if she would be my accountability partner and help monitor my health. This relationship has helped me immensely. We meet every other week. I accept her honesty (even though I may not like it at times), and she accepts mine. We know that when we’re talking with each other, it’s from the heart, and we genuinely want the best for one another. This helps us accept the truths that are sometimes hard to hear.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

You can do the same. An accountability partner must be someone with whom you feel safe to share your feelings, and he or she must be willing to do the same with you. An accountability partner isn't someone who simply tells you what you want to hear, so you'll both have to feel comfortable speaking truth into each other's lives as well.

While these lists are in no way exhaustive, they can give you a starting point to recognize your issues and move toward health. Your health is important to God, and he is walking with you every step of the way.

—PERI GILBERT is Small Group Coordinator at The Simple Church; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. How often do you take time to self-evaluate? Do you think this is often enough? Why or why not?
2. What is your usual response to painful circumstances and emotions? How healthy is your response?
3. Which of the steps to healing might help you become more emotionally healthy?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

## **Beyond Spiritual Health**

*How to pursue spiritual, relational, and physical health while in ministry*

Interview with Pete Briscoe

If everything really is "bigger in Texas," Bent Tree Church in Dallas is no exception. Thousands attend multiple services at the sprawling campus every weekend. Even senior pastor, Pete Briscoe, is scaled to size, standing 6' 5" with huge hands and a broad, disarming smile. But traditional ministry metrics like size are the furthest thing from Briscoe's mind these days.

Several years ago, a period of conflict in the church caused Briscoe to take a hard look at his own life. Ever since, he's led with a new focus and renewed freedom. Briscoe, the son of ministry leaders, Stuart and Jill Briscoe, has pastored Bent Tree for 22 years. The managing editor of *Leadership Journal*, Drew Dyck, sat down with Briscoe to talk about what it takes to get and stay healthy in ministry.

### **What do you do to stay spiritually and emotionally healthy?**

I've been on a wonderful spiritual journey in the last five years. It wasn't a journey from law to grace. But I've moved from a hybrid of law and grace to grace. I've always had a taste of grace, but over the last few years I've decided to bathe in it. And that has been, as far as my emotional and spiritual life, revolutionary.

In the past, I assumed my spiritual health was determined by how consistent I was in my quiet time, or how many books I'd read, or how long I prayed every day. I have been freed from all that. Now I recognize that my spiritual health is about how intimately I'm walking with Jesus.

It impacts every area of my life. Now I look at how open I am with people I love. When I am in the Word, what's really happening? Am I just reading a chapter to check it off or am I really listening to God? When I'm praying, am I honestly having a conversation with an Intimate, or am I just going through a list?

We talk a lot about how Christian faith is a relationship, not a religion. But I think for a lot of us it really is a religion, even in the evangelical world. It's about my quiet time, my worship, my service, my giving. It's this list. And the way we measure health is to ask, How am I doing in these areas?

### **What precipitated this shift?**

We were having unity struggles in our senior leadership. I was partially to blame; others were partially to blame. It was a mess. And it was right when we were moving into this large, new building. When you go through major transition like that, it tends to surface these sorts of issues.

It was a difficult season for me. I received some very specific and challenging criticism from the board, and so I had some soul searching to do.

My wife and I had also drifted apart. One night my wife, Libby, looked at me and said, "I'm just so angry at you, and I have no idea why." I was feeling the same. We admitted that we didn't even like each other anymore. We still loved each other, but we didn't want to be around each other.

All the important areas of my life were crashing on me. If you'd observed me from the outside, you wouldn't have known. I've got British blood in me, so I'm pretty good at keeping a stiff upper lip.

God showed me I'd had multiple identities over the years, but I had never seen myself primarily as God's son. Growing up, I was Stuart and Jill Briscoe's son. Then I was pastor of Bent Tree. That was my identity. Part of the reason the struggles in the church were so hard on me was because I couldn't separate myself from this church.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

The thought of losing the church felt like losing life itself. But God was removing the things I'd taken pride in. And that made me vulnerable enough to turn my attention to what he wanted to show me: that I was his child, first and foremost.

The only way to survive in ministry is to know that's true. And that nothing can change that. You need to hear God say, "I don't care how big the church is. I don't care if you're meeting budget. I don't care if your last sermon was better than the one before. I don't care if you're on the radio. I don't care if anyone knows your name. You're my kid." That's what matters.

Once I got that, I started to lead like I had nothing to lose. If I lose the church, I'm still his kid. I started to love my wife in fresh ways, and God rebuilt our marriage beautifully. It was all based on this identity lesson.

### What unique spiritual challenges do church leaders face?

Ministry is hazardous to your health on a number of different fronts. Think about relational health. As human beings, we need friends to be healthy. And as Christians, we know that biblical community is incredibly important to spiritual health as well as emotional and relational health. But being a ministry leader makes it really hard to make friends.

### How have you avoided this trap?

I have fallen into it in seasons, but by God's grace, I've been able to come out of it. I've found guys that do see me as friend first and pastor second. If I got fired tomorrow, they'd drive over to see if I was okay. They're true brothers, and we share life together. And that's beautiful.

### Do you work at maintaining your physical health?

I went a number of years without exercising. My health got really bad. The problem is I'm tall and slender, so I could hide it. I didn't put on 50 pounds and start to look overweight, but I was really unhealthy. My eating habits were terrible. I never exercised. I sat behind a desk for 20 years and just atrophied.

I went to the doctor and had blood work done. I was pre-diabetic and my cholesterol was through the roof. The doctor said, "We need some lifestyle changes. I don't see numbers like this in tall, slender guys like you." I was on a dangerous path.

He wanted to put me on a bunch of medications. I said, "Whoa, give me a chance. Let me make some changes." So I started to try to change my diet and exercise. The problem was my schedule didn't allow it. I didn't feel free during working hours to go work out because I didn't want to be seen as lazy.

This was before I'd undergone my experience of seeing myself first and foremost as God's son. I did not feel like it was okay for me to take care of my own health. I thought I had to take care of everyone else first.

### How did you carve out the time?

I figured out a number of years ago that the best way for me to see my family was to get home in time for dinner. The only way I could do that and lead the church was to start earlier and earlier in the morning. And so when I started to think about adding exercise four or five times a week, I realized, I can't get up any earlier.

And it wouldn't work to wake up in the middle of the night because if you're not sleeping, that hurts your health, too. But if I exercise after work, then I'd miss dinner with my family. So I went to the elders and said, "I need to figure out how to carve out time for exercise."

### What would you say to pastors who want to get in shape but can't find the time?

Prioritize it. No one will look out for your calendar if you don't. No one will look out for your own health if you don't. That's your responsibility.

Take a risk and talk to your fellow leaders. Ask them how they can help you prioritize your physical health. Tell them, "Here's what I can do, and here's what I can't. Here's what I can provide for you while taking care of myself and my family. If that's not okay with you, I probably won't last very long, and you're going to need to find someone else."

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

The vast majority of leadership teams will say, "We had no idea that you were struggling. How can we help you make boundaries?"

If you don't ask, ministry's going to eat you up. There's always too much to do. You always leave things undone. And it doesn't matter if your church is 12 people or 12,000, there's not enough time to do it all.

And so unless you paint boundaries, you will live an unhealthy life.

The late Dallas Theological Seminary professor Howard Hendricks was very heavy as a young man. His mentor at Dallas Seminary told him that he was robbing God.

When Hendricks said, "What are you talking about?" his mentor basically said, "The best years of your life, the years when you will have accumulated wisdom and experience and skill, you'll be in a grave instead of pouring into young people when they'll really need your wisdom."

It grabbed his attention and he made lifestyle changes immediately. He lost a ton of weight. And until he died at the age of 88, he was fit and trim. You would never have imagined he started out heavy and out of shape. But what his mentor told him was true.

The impact of the last 20 years of his life was unbelievable.

The decisions we make today determine whether we'll be able to do those things.

—Copyright 2014 by Christianity Today. This article is adapted from one that originally appeared in *Leadership Journal*.

### Discuss

1. Consider your closest relationships. How healthy are they? What might they tell you about your personal emotional health?
2. Do you see your physical health as important to your ministry health? Why or why not?
3. What one or two steps will you take this week to improve your overall health: emotional, mental, and physical?

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

Error! Reference source not found.

## Change Your Thoughts

*Why evaluating your thoughts is crucial to healthy leadership*

By Alan Danielson

How often do you consider the impact of your thoughts? Thoughts are powerful. Your perception of truth is what is true in your life. Our thoughts become our reality. Satan understands this human tendency and he seeks to exploit it by replaying negative and untrue thoughts in our minds over and over.

- "You're not good enough."
- "You're a failure."
- "No one really cares about you."
- "You can't do it."
- "God is ashamed of you."
- "People will never trust you."
- "You're stupid."

When we hear things like this in our heads enough, we start to believe them; we adopt them as our reality. Even though these statements are complete lies, we believe them as if they were true.

God has allowed you the opportunity to become a leader. He did not choose you so you would fail. Yet, if you believe you'll never succeed, the lie ("You're a failure.") will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Romans 12:1 (NLT) says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

Notice, changed thinking comes first. Once the way we think is changed, we'll be able to know God's will for our lives. So focus on these bits of God's truth and allow him to change your thinking:

***You're not alone.*** Every Christian leader struggles. Satan wants to take every church leader out, so remember that you're not the only person out there with a giant target on your back. Find people who will support you and listen to your struggles. Meet with a pastor, a coach, or another small-group leader when you need to vent or get advice.

***There will always be people who don't get it.*** No matter how good you are at communicating the vision for small groups, there will always be someone who doesn't get it. And that's simply because we're broken people. Some of your group members may not understand, embrace, or follow the mission of your group. And those people have a tendency to pull small-group leaders down. Refuse to be dragged down by people who don't understand. Continue to communicate the vision with the hopes that everyone will be on board, but don't let anyone steal your joy.

***Sheep bites won't kill you.*** [Brady Boyd](#) wrote, "Sheep bites can't kill me, but the gnawing will make life miserable a few days each year." That phrase has stuck with me and helped me through some pretty annoying times. As you shepherd your group, the sheep will bite sometimes. When the sheep are biting, try to think of it like a common cold: "I'm going to feel bad for a few days, but I'll get well soon."

***God believes in you.*** Consider how powerful that statement really is. God called you and gave you the opportunity to lead a small group. He will equip you, and he believes you are teachable enough to develop the character he wants for you. You may feel like you can't keep going. You may feel like no one supports you. But that's just not true. God believes in you and he's in your corner.

***There are people in your church who love and support you.*** On the occasion that negative voices rise, it's easy for them to feel louder than the positive ones. Never forget the people God has put under your leadership

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

who support you. Remember to thank and support them. Because even when it feels like everyone's against you, you have some people in your corner.

***It's worth it!*** There will be days when you wonder if the sacrifices you and your family make for ministry are really worth it. The answer is "Yes!" People will experience spiritual growth, biblical fellowship, and authentic mission because of your ministry. Lives will be changed, marriages saved, hope found, and truth taught. Don't give up, because you are making a difference. God is eagerly preparing a place for you in heaven that will outshine anything you could ever have here on Earth. If you finish well, God will one day say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." When he does, all of the struggles you've faced will disappear and you'll know for certain that it was indeed worth it.

We have so much stacked against us in ministry: a spiritual enemy, a fast-paced world, personal issues, and interpersonal challenges. What we have going for us, though, is greater than all of these: our heavenly Father. He has given us his word and some practical tools that can help sustain us, but it's up to each of us to avail ourselves of them. Will you leverage disciplines, rhythms, and thoughts to survive and thrive, or will you leave these tools in the toolbox only to find yourself discouraged and burned out?

—ALAN DANIELSON is the Senior Pastor of New Life Bible Church in Norman, Oklahoma; copyright 2013 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. When are you most likely to experience negative thoughts?
2. How do you normally handle negative or unhelpful thoughts? How might you handle them in a more helpful or healthy way?
3. Who in your life helps you have a realistic view of things? Who in your life might help you keep your negative thoughts in check?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

## **Envy: A Temptation of Leadership**

*It's one of the respectable sins we find easy to hide.*

By Marlena Graves

Christian leaders struggle with all sorts of temptations. We fool ourselves if we think otherwise. It's how we handle those temptations that determine whether or not lives will be destroyed.

Often when we think of Christian leaders and their temptations, we think about the so-called “big” sins, those usually having to do with sexual immorality. But there are many more temptations than meet the eye—temptations to commit “respectable sins,” or sins we're prone to tolerate, as Jerry Bridges notes. These are often sins that are easier to hide, at least initially. One not talked about nearly enough is envy.

### **Why We Envy**

When we envy people, we believe something they possess, or something we think they possess, makes them superior to us. Not only do we want what they have, we want to outshine them. Maybe it's . . .

- a bigger church
- a particular ministry
- lots of influence
- a dream job
- a relationship
- youth and beauty
- gifts and talents
- a particular virtue
- a bevy of opportunities

It need not be one thing; it could be a combination of traits and characteristics that we envy. In her book [Glittering Vices](#), Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung says envy is the sin of the “have-nots,” that is, people who feel like they are lacking whether or not they actually are. The issue here is not poverty; rather, it's a matter of so badly yearning for what others have that without it, we feel inferior. Their success, or perceived success, makes us miserable.

Perhaps we believe they're undeserving of these gifts and *we're* the deserving ones. We're the ones who've been faithful to God and who are more competent. We're the ones who've had to scrape by, working hard just to get what little we have. We put in so much effort with little payoff. They, on the other hand, have had it easy. Why are they prospering when they've done very little, they haven't been good stewards, and they have wrong-headed theology? Why are they the favored ones? Doesn't God see the good work we are doing for him? “It isn't fair! It isn't fair!” we cry.

Envy has us acting the part of the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son—even if no one around us has a clue. We cross arms. We sulk. We throw a pity party for ourselves, refusing to rejoice with those who rejoice. We feel as though God has kicked us to the curb. We may even attempt to underhandedly sabotage the objects of our envy. What we are doing is refusing to listen to the Father's voice telling us, “Everything I have is yours” (Luke 15:31).

Unrepentant envy leads to hatred.

According to [New Advent](#), one definition of “hatred” is hostility toward another person that...

indulges a propensity to see what is evil and unlovable in him, feels a fierce satisfaction at anything tending to his discredit, and is keenly desirous that his lot may be an unmixedly hard one, either in general or in this or that specified way.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

Envy fuels hatred, which in turns fuels strife. For example, think about the cat and dogfights online between Christians.

Recently I sat aghast as I scrolled through my Twitter feed. Earlier that day, a few guys had beat up on a well-known female Christian blogger. Thankfully, I saw that many had come to her defense. I couldn't help wondering if the offenders' vitriol had more to do with their envy over her widespread influence than opposing theological viewpoints. What is so warped about envy is that our sense of wellbeing is so fragile that it can sometimes hinge on the demise of others—our rivals. We feel confident and successful if and only if we've one-upped them. Are our blessings really blessings if they're contingent on other people being cursed?

Not only do we envy those who have what we desire, we tend to be envious of those with similar interests and gifts. I deeply appreciate the skills and talents of musicians. Growing up, I never had the chance to learn an instrument (though I'd like to someday). So at this point at least, I don't struggle with envy toward musicians. But, I've certainly been envious of other writers. Similarly, pastors tend to envy pastors and worship leaders other worship leaders.

### What to Do with Envy

As Christian leaders, what do we do with our envy? First we own up to it, we confess it. We confess to God and trusted others. There is a communal aspect to dealing with our envy; exposing our struggle in a beloved community of trusted others will help keep us accountable. It is especially important that Christian leaders regularly practice the discipline of confession. It may even be necessary to confess it to, and seek the forgiveness of, the one we've wronged through our hateful words and actions. Perhaps we will even have to make restitution.

In addition to confession, we need to practice the discipline of fasting regularly. For some that means fasting from Facebook and other social media in to order starve the envy inside. Pastor Daniel Darling noted that he had to stop going to popular conferences and heed the advice of another pastor who told him to stop reading church growth books. Fasting from these things would reign in his envy. It would stave off his proclivity to compare his ministry to others whose ministries appear to him as more successful—it'd stave off discouragement.

Third, we ask God to reveal and remind us of his unconditional love for us. Borrowing a phrase from Father Greg Boyle, when a "soul knows its worth," it won't envy. Konyndyk DeYoung writes:

A self secure in its unconditional worth, a worth based on God's love, is a self free to affirm others' gifts without feeling threatened or thereby made inferior. It is a self free to love without anxiety that its own contributions will be compared to another's and found wanting. It's a self that is able to take joy in its own good and the good of others.

Envy is a sin that seeks to sink its claws into the souls of Christian leaders, thereby agitating their souls and poisoning their ministry. Some of us walk around miserable because we have our eyes on everything and everyone but Jesus. It's critically important that we regularly take time to reflect to see if envy might be fueling our misery. And if so, we can take the steps to be rid of it.

—MARLENA GRAVES is a regular contributor to Gifted for Leadership and Her.meneutics; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today. This article adapted from one that originally appeared on [Gifted For Leadership](#).

### Discuss

1. When have you been envious of someone else? How did it turn out?
2. How have you seen envy lead to hatred and other negative thoughts?
3. What can you do the next time you experience envy?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

## **A Seaworthy Leader**

*Why Sabbath rest is crucial to stay afloat*

By Bert Crabbe

In January 1999, the North Atlantic commercial fishing industry saw a deadly string of accidents. In a 13-day span, the *Cape Fear*, the *Adriatic*, and the *Beth Dee Bob* were lost at sea off the coast of New Jersey. In all, 10 men died, 5 never to be found.

Commercial fishing is widely known to be a dangerous way to make a living. But even in a profession known for its hazards, three ships lost in such a short period of time is extraordinarily rare, particularly when all three were from the same docks.

Investigations revealed the following facts about the three separate tragedies:

1. None involved a hull breach.
2. All three ships were piloted by veteran captains with 10 years or more in the wheelhouse.
3. All three ships were near the end of their journey, less than 15 miles from home.

So what happened?

Two of the three ships were carrying too much weight, and one was carrying its weight improperly.

Commercial vessels on the water in early January are mostly clam boats, as were the *Cape Fear*, the *Adriatic*, and the *Beth Dee Bob*. A commercial clam trap is 3' x 3' x 4' and weighs 300 pounds empty. Laden with quahogs, they weigh in at between 1 and 1.5 tons apiece! The *Cape Fear* and the *Adriatic* each had 10 extra traps on board. That's 10–15 tons of excess weight!

Interviewers later asked other boat captains who fished these waters the following question: Why would a veteran boat captain completely ignore the papers on his boat and attempt to carry 10–15 tons more than was safe? Time after time, the answer came in the form of a quizzical look and a shrug. Simply put, the behavior was common practice. These captains didn't perceive themselves to be in danger. They were simply doing what was normal in their industry.

Regrettably, commercial fishermen aren't the only ones who tend to carry too much. Have you noticed? Pastors and church leaders do the same thing. In our "industry," workaholic is normal. It's normal for a pastor to never turn off his phone, always be on call, and never take a Sabbath day. And we don't perceive ourselves to be in danger.

Normal or not, however, this behavior is dangerous. We have, in large part, ignored the paperwork on our souls. It's an easy pattern to slip into. After all, in our culture, busyness is a virtue!

When you run into someone you haven't seen in a while and they ask how you're doing, how do you respond? More than likely, you say something like this: "Busy. Just super busy. Life has been really crazy lately."

Then the person who asked the question responds in kind. "Oh, yeah. Me too. I've been slammed lately."

Ever have someone try to one-up you on the busyness scale? It happens all the time. Why? Because busyness confers importance. No one would ever say, "What have I been up to? Nothing. I've just been sitting around with my feet up. How about you?" It would be socially unacceptable. A pastor who responded that way might be thought of as lazy, which is shameful and unacceptable to us. So we stay busy. And we cast aside the commandment God has given us: to rest regularly.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

Pastors are no different from other Christians in terms of our calling to keep the Bible's commandments. If anything, we are even more accountable. No one would ever use a position in ministry to excuse the violation of a commandment.

Can you imagine a pastor saying, "You know what, I'm a pastor, so it's totally okay for me to lie." Or, "I covet my neighbor's wife, but it's fine; I'm a church leader."

Never. We'd never try to get away with that. Yet, it's completely normal for people to say, "I'm a pastor, so I don't take a Sabbath day."

I realized that for me at least, this had to stop. All of us are under a biblical mandate to rest from our work one day a week. This is not optional—it's a commandment, the disobedience of which comes with some dire consequences.

The principle is this: we work for six days, and we trust God for seven days of provision. The pattern reminds us that we need him; that we can't do this on our own. When we ignore this commandment, we're telling God we don't need his help; we are self-sufficient. And we're telling ourselves we're so important that we cannot afford to step away from our labors for one day a week.

No matter how we frame it, like the doomed fishing boats, we're carrying too much.

### Can a Pastor Punch Out?

Of course, resting from a position in ministry isn't easy. It's not as simple as, say, not getting on a fishing boat. Our "job" is a calling. A role. It's like being a parent—can you take a Sabbath from being a mom or a dad?

We don't punch a clock. Even when we're out of the office, there's never a moment when our role doesn't follow us. The calling is a constant. We can't punch out from being in demand. Someone always needs our attention. There's always another person to care for, another issue to pray for, another book to read.

The only alternative is to seal ourselves off, and that's almost impossible. Between e-mails, social media, and thinking about ministry, there's always something calling for our attention.

Some are reading this right now and thinking that this is altogether inconceivable. I know. So do we just give up trying to keep the Sabbath? No, I don't think that's what Jesus intends for us.

Jesus regularly got away from the crowds to pray. I believe my Sabbath needs to include a sharp break from e-mail, phone calls, and any contact at all that would cause me to think about my ministry. This is so that even if we bear the weight of leadership for six days in a row, on the seventh day, the pattern of Sabbath forces us to place our ministry in God's hands.

Fail in this, and you greatly increase your chances of a shipwreck.

The *Cape Fear*, the *Adriatic*, and the *Beth Dee Bob* all went down in heavy weather. Not the kind of weather that wrecks all ships in the area, not the "perfect storm" scenario, and probably nothing the respective captains hadn't seen before. But even when dealing with a "normal" sized storm, when you enter the equation compromised by too great a load, you greatly increase your chance for disaster.

### Improper Weight-Bearing

We learned earlier that two of the three ships were carrying too much weight. The third? Technically within the weight limits, but carrying improperly. The crew of the *Beth Dee Bob* had stacked full traps on top of empty ones (a practice the ship's architect had forbidden), changing the boats' center of gravity in a way that rendered it not crippled but compromised.

The arrangement of these particular traps left the ship's stability vulnerable to the waves that later broke over her bow. With this disadvantage, even a veteran captain and crew couldn't navigate the weather system they were facing.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

The ship had violated one of the key principles of a seaworthy vessel: it must be heavier below the waterline than above. The nautical term for weight below the waterline is ballast. The weight below decks is what makes a sailboat pop back upright after the wind and waves push it sideways.

The ballast principle is another one widely ignored by church leaders. It's in the secret, quiet places where our ballast is gained. It's time alone with God that gives us spiritual weight.

Too many leaders look great above the waterline and lack the weight beneath to reach into people's lives. Above the waterline? Teeth are whitened and clothes are stylish and hair has just the right amount of product. Our shoes work and the frames of our glasses create such the right vibe. We have the right amount of social media presence and from all visible accounts, things are moving up and to the right.

In other words, the ship looks great from the waterline up. The sails, the deck and the brass railings look fantastic.

Unfortunately, everything that makes a ship seaworthy is below the waterline, found in the invisible places. And many church leaders who look great when tied to the dock get into real trouble when the wind kicks up.

A leader who ignores God's commandment to rest has adjusted the center of gravity in the wrong direction. It doesn't mean you don't have anything good to say, nor does it mean that disaster is imminent. But it does mean that a common confluence of weather, pressure, and fatigue is far more likely to send you to the bottom.

### Ready For Deeper Waters

So how do we escape this fate? One way is to keep to the shallows and never leave the harbor. Stay tied to the dock, all appearances in order and everything looking good. Sounds good, right? Nice and safe.

The only trouble is that sooner or later your calling will pull you into the deep. It inevitably does.

Part of what keeps me locked into my Sabbath routine is healthy fear. The respect that a good captain affords the sea is something akin to that healthy fear. I know that at any moment I could be called upon to speak into a family in crisis, called to the bedside of a dying child or the site of a horrible car accident.

If, in that moment, I am carrying too much or if, in that moment, my spiritual center of gravity has been compromised, my words will be hollow, I'll founder and stumble and place myself and all who look to me for guidance in the path of even further damage.

No, the only way to avoid the fate of the *Cape Fear*, the *Adriatic*, and the *Beth Dee Bob* is to pay careful attention to the paperwork issued to my soul by its Builder. God has warned me and commanded me: for one day a week, you will rest. Take on spiritual weight. Gain ballast below the waterline.

So that when my ministry pulls me into deep waters, as it always will, I will find my soul seaworthy.

—BERT CRABBE is pastor of True North Community Church, Long Island, New York; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today. This article is adapted from one that originally appeared in *Leadership Journal*.

### Discuss

1. Why is taking time for Sabbath rest especially difficult for leaders?
2. Why is taking time for Sabbath rest especially important for leaders?
3. How often do you take a break from ministry? For how long do you take a break?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

**Error! Reference source not found.**

## **Learn to Rest from Ministry**

*How to leave the work at work*

By Seth Widner

Although our 24/7 world offers convenient benefits, it has taken its toll on people. Most people work too much. In the last two decades, our hours at work have risen 15 percent, yet our time off has dropped 30 percent. We rarely stop to rest. As a result, our health, families, finances, ministries, and friendships are paying the price.

Those of us in small-group leadership are not immune to the effects of this culture. The rising demands and high expectations of our availability have caused great stress. Many leaders are expected to be available to church members every day and at any time. This is often an unspoken rule. We may be given permission to take regular time off, but many of us rarely take advantage of it. Even when we're not actually leading or coaching, we like to keep tabs on e-mail, social media, phone calls, and text messages. Our personal lives are often blended with our ministries, and we're willing to make the sacrifice because we love the people we serve. But this is a dangerous place to be.

### **Bill's Story**

When I met Bill, he'd been serving in small-group ministry for several years. He's led men's groups and couples' groups, and he's coached many leaders over the years. People naturally look to Bill when they need help because he's a fountain of wisdom.

Recently, I met Bill for lunch. As we sat down, he didn't seem to be himself. He seemed tired, scatterbrained, and a little cranky. This was totally out of character, and it caught my attention. Bill is normally cheerful, peaceful, and focused. So I asked him what was troubling him. He confessed that he was thinking about taking some time off from small-group ministry. As he listed off his reasons, he kept coming back to a lack of time. It caught my attention because Bill is retired, and this had never seemed to be an issue in the past.

Bill shared the details of his schedule. He was leading a couple's group with his wife and coaching several leaders. These tasks in themselves were not the cause of Bill's fatigue. He had balanced his time very well in the past, so I dug a little deeper.

A couple in his small group had recently experienced a job loss. The husband's job had been their primary source of income, and the family didn't know how they would pay their immediate bills. Although the man believed he could get another job quickly, they were faced with a mortgage to pay in the meantime. So Bill rallied his group to help their friends out financially. Unfortunately, Bill didn't define exactly how much the group would help, so when the husband's job search took longer than expected, Bill felt pressure to continue assisting the family.

After two months, though, the group members had contributed all that they could give. The distressed family began calling and e-mailing Bill for help. The husband would explain that he had job interviews lined up but still needed to pay his bills. The financial stress was causing the husband to be more demanding than thankful. Bill continued trying to help them by networking for financial help and job leads for the husband.

The situation had taken its toll on Bill. He was tired, stressed, and concerned for his small group. Thinking about caring for this couple had consumed him. Because they hadn't set boundaries at the outset, Bill felt pressured to help more than he could, and the group members were frustrated by the couples' demands for more. Plus, the couple was left expecting more help than was feasible for the group.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

### Choosing to Rest

Sometimes our love for people and devotion to small-group ministry drives us to go above and beyond the call of duty. There's nothing wrong with putting in overtime hours from time to time. In fact, during some seasons of ministry, it's needed. But these seasons should not be the norm. As leaders, we need rest and relaxation. We must learn to leave the work at work. We can't be ministering 24 hours a day—and God never asked this of us.

To ensure that you have healthy boundaries for your ministry and that you get the rest you need, follow these steps:

**1. Establish time off.** Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." As leaders, it's easy to focus on doing rather than being. Being still can be extremely difficult, especially when our culture seems to tell us to be on the go constantly. We must establish regular time off so that we can be still and rest. When we neglect this, our ability to know God intimately and sense his guidance will be hindered. When we struggle to sense his guidance, we'll be tempted to lead in our own power. If we want our small-group ministries to be healthy, then our leadership must flow from our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Although there are many kinds of time off (vacations, personal days, holidays), I'm referring to weekly days off. Scripture calls this Sabbath. In six days, God created the heavens and the earth. On the seventh day, he kicked up his heels and enjoyed time off (Genesis 2:1–3). Did God actually need this time off? Absolutely not. Our God is all-powerful! Nothing drains his all-surpassing energy. So why would the God of all creation take time off? Our God is the God who chooses to rest. He doesn't have to, but he chooses to. And he commands us to do the same (Exodus 20:8–10). When we choose to keep a weekly Sabbath, we set ourselves apart from the hustle and bustle of our 24/7 culture. Instead of conforming to the ways of our world, we set ourselves apart to be like God.

**2. Communicate your time off.** This is very crucial step. Once you've established your Sabbath day, make it common knowledge to everyone that needs to know. That means if you're the small-group pastor, you'll need to make sure your hours are posted somewhere and the other staff knows them as well. If you're a coach, make sure your leaders know when you're available, and if you're a leader, communicate this clearly to your group members. Don't just say you're not available. Communicate that you're setting that time aside as Sabbath rest. Let them know that you'll be resting and spending time with God and your family that day.

**3. Replace yourself during time off.** Find someone to be available to minister during your Sabbath. This way, ministry can continue while you get some rest. This can be as simple as delegating any emergencies that day to another leader or coach. But make sure this person is on board and capable. Your goal is to have a day off, which includes being free from last-minute questions from your replacement.

**4. Enjoy your time off.** Don't feel guilty for taking time off! You're being obedient to Scripture and ensuring that you're a healthy leader for those God has entrusted to you. Take a walk, sit on your back porch, spend time in prayer, read Scripture, play with your children, laugh with your spouse, call a good friend, and enjoy yourself. Do things that will bring you rest and nourish your soul.

During my weekly Sabbath, I have one rule: no chores. This was hard to follow at first. I would be relaxing in my home and notice something that needed to be done, like washing dishes, and then one chore would lead to another until my day was filled with them. It left me without any rest, and I was more exhausted after my Sabbath day than when I'd woken up. Now I take care of chores either before or after the Sabbath so I can rest.

**5. Guard your time off.** This is a hard step to take because our personal lives are often blended with our ministries. We love people and we have relationships with them, and the last thing we want to do is make someone feel rejected. If you're going to enjoy time off, though, you'll have to guard it. So be prepared. I recommend not opening your e-mail so that you aren't distracted. The same goes for social media so that you aren't caught up in what's happening with those to whom you minister. Refuse to answer calls or texts from people in ministry for the day. That's what your replacement is for. If it makes you feel better, set up some boundaries ahead of time with your replacement for appropriate times to contact you. Don't respond to any other contact. This sets a clear expectation and boundary that others will soon pick up on and begin honoring.

## HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

If you want to follow Christ's example, you'll need to make the decision to rest and then follow through. It may be difficult at first, but it will be well worth it in the end. You'll be a healthier leader, and you'll be more able to minister to those around you. Refuse to follow the culture's mandate of 24/7 work, and instead follow God's plans for labor and rest.

—SETH WIDNER served as the small-group pastor of The Journey church and is the founder of i58revolution, an organization that supports healthy families; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. Do you have healthy boundaries in your ministry that allow regular rest? Why or why not?
2. How might you set aside a certain day each week to be "off duty" when it comes to ministry?
3. If you had consistent time off, what might you do to enjoy that time off?

**HEALTHY LEADERSHIP**

Error! Reference source not found.

**Further Exploration**

*Websites and books to help you become and stay a healthy leader*

**[SmallGroups.com](#)**. We specialize in equipping churches and small-group leaders to make disciples and strengthen community.

- [Avoiding Burnout](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Foundations of a Small-Group Leader](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Healthy Boundaries for Small Groups](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Soul Care](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Spiritual Disciplines for Busy Church Leaders](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)

**[BuildingChurchLeaders.com](#)**. A website with practical training tools for various church leadership roles.

**[LeadershipJournal.net](#)**. A website offering practical advice and articles for church leaders.

**[GiftedforLeadership.com](#)**. A website ministering to women leaders.

**[Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ](#)** by Peter Scazzero. Seven biblical, reality-tested ways to break through to the revolutionary life Christ meant for you (Thomas Nelson, 2011; ISBN 978-0849946424).

**[Leadership from the Inside Out: Examining the Inner Life of a Healthy Church Leader](#)** by Kevin G. Harney. Explore the process of building and maintaining a growing community from concept to practice (Beacon Hill Press, 2007; ISBN 978-0-8341-2337-3).

**[The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self](#)** by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. If the goal of the Christian journey is Christlikeness, then you must reckon with the unhealthy ways that you root your sense of being in things other than God (IVP Books, 2006; ISBN 978-0830832774).