



DEVOTIONAL

Multiply:

40 DAYS
OF PRAYING
THE CHURCH
FORWARD

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Theological Note

Scripture is clear that satan is a created being. He is not omnipotent. He is not omniscient. He is not ever-present. He is not the “equal but opposite” countervailing force to our omnipotent, covenant-making Heavenly Father. The English translation of the great reformational hymn “A Mighty Fortress” rightly speaks of satan this way: “The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! His doom is sure; one little word shall fell him.” To that end, no reference to satan is capitalized in this book except when it appears as the first word in a sentence.

OVERVIEW

Purpose

This guide urges church members and leaders to pursue ongoing leader development through strategic meditation on God's purpose and design for leadership in life and ministry.

Description

The forty devotionals in this guide fall under six broad categories as shown in the following synopsis. Each opens with a Bible verse and contains a brief commentary, a Leadership Affirmation, and a Prayer for Protection. The first is an affirmation of confidence, obedience, and acknowledgment of God's gracious call on your life as a leader. The second is a request for protection from temptation to resort to leadership practices that are inconsistent with the grace we have received through Jesus Christ our Lord. We encourage you to verbalize each day's declarations with humility and conviction, confidence, and gratitude.

There Is No Plan B is the opening grouping. From the dawn of creation, God's grand design is that human beings, created in His image, will lead, collaborate, create, and make a difference in the good world He made. He has no plan B. We may not think we're much, but we're all He's got, *by* and *for* the pleasure of His will!

The next grouping, *What's In Comes Out*, shines light on the attributes of integrity, humility, love, courage, and perseverance as revealed in Jesus' example and teaching in John 13:1-27.

Drawing from Mark 10:35-45, *Causal not Casual* illustrates the attitudes of trustworthiness, servant-heartedness, empathy, resilience, and diligence. Each is a direct byproduct of the underlying attributes Jesus possessed in full measure.

Scripture abounds with stories of *The Improbables*, the fourth grouping of devotionals, stories of often overlooked men and women whom God used to change the history of the world, indeed of eternity itself.

The fifth grouping lifts the ultimate leadership *Flag to Follow*, the banner waved by the Resurrected Jesus to the earliest disciples and every generation of Christ-followers since that day. We call that banner The Great Commission.

The concluding devotionals, grouped under the Latin word *Vocatio*, raise the issue of *your* calling. No matter your vocational training, your highest calling is to be on mission with the One who created us, redeemed us, gifted us, and sends us out to continue His creational plan: that we be difference-makers in this fallen world.

INTRODUCTION

The motivation for the Nine Thirty-One Leadership Pipeline grows out of my own sense of inadequacy as a pastor. It is based on Acts 9:31: the Church was strengthened and the number of churches increased! They were edified, and then they multiplied. That's the kind of awakening I long to see the Lord do again!

I had been serving a wonderful congregation for about eighteen months, and we saw the Lord do some amazing things. As a direct result of a divine moment from the Lord, we saw scores of people trusting in Christ and being incorporated into the fellowship of the church. As we hit a plateau in evangelism, outreach, discipleship, and passion, I searched for root causes, thinking surely it was the people in the church.

One morning, I was in my prayer closet. There was a big mirror hanging on the back of the door, and I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the mirror. The Holy Spirit gave me a moment of clarity, and for the first time, I asked the question, "What if they're not the problem? What if I'm the problem?"

The Lord showed me an uncomfortable truth. I was the problem. The church had outgrown my capacity to lead it forward. To continue being effective as a pastor, I had to grow as a leader.

We tend to think of leadership as something that you have or don't have, that we're born with or not born with. We think that if you can lead this, then you must be able to lead that. None of those ideas are true. There are layers of effective leadership. But, at its core, leadership is influence. It is equipping and motivating others to attempt objectives that honor God and fulfill His purposes.

The booklet is designed to lift up forty leadership principles that matter to God. Each devotion contains a Leadership Affirmation. I ask you to read it aloud and to repeat with conviction as many times as it takes to ring true in your own ears and heart. I sincerely hope this helps you move a step closer to being the leader God designed you to be!

Your Obedient Servant,



Dr. Josh Franks

Tennessee Baptist Mission Board

There Is No Plan B: Days 1 through 7

God has big designs for you, bigger than you can possibly imagine. He has designs for your home, for your church, and for your community. He has designs to bless you, to prosper you. God is deeply invested in the joy and well-being of His children in all aspects of their lives. But, to receive all the blessings God has for us, we must operate within the framework of His grand design.

The creation of Adam and Eve culminates God's creative process. They crown His design for the world He made. He designed them, and us, in His image. God is creative. So are we. God is relational. So are we. God is the Ultimate Leader. And He made us to lead. This devotional guide draws attention to the leadership component that is often overlooked when we discuss the Image of God. God designed that both men and women would be leaders.¹

God's designs are always best. We're the ones who mess things up. We see it in Genesis. We see it today. God created a perfect world. And for a time, He had a perfect relationship with humanity. God walked in the Garden in the cool of the evening with Adam and Eve. And then one day, Adam and Eve chose disobedience. They chose another plan. Sin entered the world. And every single person since then, except Jesus, has chosen that same path. We've chosen to reject God's design for perfection, and we suffer for it.

But here's the beauty of the redemption story. The Christian message is of God redeeming His original design. It's true each time he redeems a sinner and restores our relationship with Him. And it's true in other areas of our lives as well.

When we operate inside the leadership framework God created, we're blessed. When we operate outside of God's framework, we suffer. It really is that simple. God designed humanity for a leadership purpose. And we miss many of the blessings God intends for us to have because we operate outside of His leadership design. We often do it unknowingly and unintentionally. But when we don't operate inside of God's design, not only do we suffer, but the people God has given us the responsibility to lead will suffer as well.

DAY 1

Made in God's Image

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

Genesis 1:26

Leadership Affirmation

You created me to lead others, that collectively we may know You in Your fullness and experience Your covenantal love in community with one another.

God designed us to be leaders. It's baked into His creation design. God created humanity to lead everything He created. We see this in the opening chapter of Genesis. In verse 27, God *acts*; in verse 28, He *assigns*. In verse 27, God *creates* man as male and female in His image; in verse 28, He *commissions* “them” to rule over and subdue the creation He had made.

In the beginning, everything was perfect. But the first sin completely corrupted every aspect of God's design, including His design for leadership. From that moment forward, men and women want to dominate others, and even each other. We want power and control. And we don't want anyone else to have power and control over us. Not only do we try to dominate, but we also rebel against the structure God has put in place.

Just as there is an orderliness in God's good creation, there are orderly principles for leadership sprinkled throughout God's word. We all have an equal capacity to know God and experience Him in His fullness. But no two of us are given the same gifts, talents, capacities, or assignments. We can learn His leadership principles, develop our skills, and become more effective in leading our homes, churches, and communities.

Genesis 1 closes with God declaring that everything He had made was *very good*. The next 1,188 chapters of this amazing book, which we call the Bible, carry forward the grand themes of human history: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Ultimate Consummation. But none of these themes obscures God's fundamental creational design: God designed you, made in His image, to be a leader.

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, protect me from the wiles of satan, tempting me to settle for leadership practices that belie my total reliance on the Holy Spirit.

DAY 2

Male and Female Created He Them

So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God;
He created them male and female.

Genesis 1:27

Leadership Affirmation

*Lord, you designed me in Your image so I may lead others at this precise moment in history
to make an eternal impact!*

God designed both males and females to have a direct covenantal relationship with Him. Creatationally, they (and we) are *male and female*. Spiritually, we are *one*.

Every human has been made in the image of God. Every human being has the capacity to know the Lord personally, to enter a covenantal relationship with Him by faith in Jesus Christ. Every human being can experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit ministers directly to us through our spirits. Every human being has the capacity to know God, to glorify Him, to enjoy Him forever.

Joel proclaimed the Lord's anointing on all humanity, both sons and daughters, male and female (Joel 2), which Peter referenced on the Day of Pentecost as happening before the people's eyes (Acts 2).

The angel spoke to Mary independently of the appearance to Joseph, and to Joseph independently of the appearance to Mary, in announcing Jesus' birth (Luke 1; Matthew 1). The Holy Spirit spoke blessing through both the aged Simeon and the aged Anna when Jesus was dedicated at the Temple (Luke 2).

Peter proclaimed that husband and wife are *coheirs of the grace of life* (1 Peter 3:7). Paul wrote that, in Christian baptism, there is *not male and female*; in Christ, we are all *heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:27–29). Imperative verbs in passages such as Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Timothy 2, and 1 Peter 3 underscore that the Lord speaks directly to husbands *and* wives, fathers *and* mothers, men *and* women.

Being made in the image of God, Adam and Eve both enjoyed shame-free fellowship with God in the Garden. And the redemptive grace God extended to the first couple has not changed!

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, I refuse to sacrifice my relationship with You. Keep me focused. Keep me strong.

DAY THREE

Called to Complement

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.”

Genesis 2:18

Leadership Affirmation

My identity rests in who I am in You. My leadership is a natural extension of my relationship of being “in Christ.”

The word complement means to help by making something complete. It is a fitting way to understand the underlying masculine Hebrew noun *ezer*, used twice in the Creation narrative (Genesis 2:18, 20).¹¹

With respect to leadership and male and female roles, God has designed both men and women to be leaders. This can be challenging for our culture and our churches because God designed men and women to lead differently and in different areas. That shouldn’t be a challenging thought. Common sense sees that God created men and women with differences. We are all created equal, but we are not all created the same.

A problem occurs when we assign a value structure to what God has given. God doesn’t assign different values to different roles. The small church pastor is just as valuable and integral to God’s work as a large church pastor. They are equal in God’s eyes, but He’s given them different roles and responsibilities. Similarly, God gives men and women different leadership roles and responsibilities.

God designed mothers and fathers to lead in different areas of their *homes*. When they don’t lead the way God designed, the spouse suffers, and the children suffer. God designed men and women to be leaders in different areas of the *church*. Every believer has been gifted by God for a leadership role in the Church. When we don’t exercise that fully, every person in the church suffers. God designed you to be a leader in the *community*, in your place of work, in the places you go, and in the things you do. You were created for this.

Whether in the home, the church, or the community, God is deeply invested in the joy and well-being of His children. When we operate within the framework of His grand design, we experience the blessings God has for us.

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, deliver me from focusing on what You have not called me to; lead me, rather, to experience to the fullest the joys of what You have called me to.

DAY 4

Man in the House

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. ...

Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 5:25–26; 6:4

Leadership Affirmation

Those who know me best respect me as a leader because I routinely reflect the character of the indwelling Christ before them.

Men and women are designed by God to lead in the home, but in complementary ways. As the leader of his home, the Lord held Adam responsible for sin entering the world. In a similar way, as leaders in their homes, husbands and fathers will one day give an account to the Lord for how they modeled godliness to their families.

Men are designed for leadership through spiritual direction in their homes. Men, you are called to set the tone for your family by being spiritual leaders of your household. Joshua declared, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Spiritual leadership means modeling the sacrificial love of Jesus for your wife and children (Ephesians 5:25).

Men lead through material provision in their homes. Fathers are responsible for providing for the physical and emotional needs of their families, ensuring their well-being and security. Paul boldly addressed the strong work ethic fathers must model: “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). In many families, the wife and mother earns more than her husband. That’s perfectly fine. Women have a valuable role in business and financial affairs. But a man is designed to support his household through his work.

Men lead through loving correction in their homes. The writer of Hebrews compares our Heavenly Father with earthly fathers: *For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?* (Hebrews 12:7). Fathers are called to discipline their children with love and wisdom, helping them to grow in righteousness and maturity.

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, protect me from accepting leadership responsibilities that lead me to take for granted those I love most.

DAY 5

Woman in the House

She watches over the activities of her household and is never idle. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also praises her.

Proverbs 31:27–28

Leadership Affirmation

My greatest fulfillment in leading my family is to know they see the reflection of Christ's character shining through me.

Men and women are designed by God to lead in the home, but in complementary ways. When the Lord presented Eve to Adam, his poem expressed an eternal truth: She is just like me, only different! She is *bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh*; but she is *woman*, not *man* (in the Hebrew text, she is *ishah*, not *ish*).

As the one who gives birth, *women are designed for leadership through nurturing and teaching* in their homes. If all you have is the father's strict discipline, you have a very sad home. Mothers are generally more gifted at nurturing their children, providing both physical care and emotional support. They play a crucial role in teaching their children about God and His ways (Proverbs 1:8–9; 2 Timothy 1:5).

Women are designed for leadership through wisdom and guidance in their homes. Leadership is not ordering people around, whether man or woman; it is influencing others through wisdom and guidance. This is what women are designed to do. They provide wisdom and guidance to their husbands and children, helping them navigate life's challenges and make godly decisions (Proverbs 31:26; 6:20–22).

Women are designed for leadership through encouragement and support in their homes. Fathers and mothers are both encouragers in the home, but mothers have a special anointing to help their children grow in confidence and in their relationship with God (Isaiah 66:13; Deuteronomy 6:6–7; 1 Timothy 2:15).

God designed men and women to complement one another, the strengths of one balancing the weaknesses of the other in multiple ways so that, together, they can present to the Lord “one home under God.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, I lead me to rejoice in the part I play to develop a spiritually vibrant home.

DAY 6

Impacting the Community

And it will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.

Acts 2:17

Leadership Affirmation

I long for my life to radiate the grace of the Lord, the compassion of the Spirit, and the fullness of Christ upon every person I lead.

Just as men and women are gifted by God to lead in the home, the Lord commissions them to lead in the community. The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, laid out a specific set of spiritual requirements the Lord is looking for in His people: faithful leaders who act justly, who love faithfulness, and who walk humbly with the Lord our God (Micah 6:8). Scripture is replete with stories of such men and women.

In every generation, *God designed both men and women to lead in advocacy and justice*. In the prologue to the acrostic poem we know as “The Virtuous Woman,” the king’s mother gave this stirring admonition to her son to lead by serving others: *Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy* (Proverbs 31:8–9). Men and women alike advocate for justice, care for the marginalized, and fight for the rights of the oppressed.

In society, *God designed both men and women to lead with charity and service*. Leading by serving their communities provides for the needs of the poor, shows hospitality, reflects the heart of Christ, and meets practical needs within the community (Proverbs 31:20; Matthew 25:34–40; Acts 9:36–39; James 1:27–2:20).

In society, *God designed both men and women to lead in business and enterprise*. Men and women alike engage in business and enterprise, contributing to the economic development and prosperity of their communities. Scripture applauds the artisans who worked “with integrity” in renovating the Temple in Josiah’s day (2 Chronicles 34:8–13). It also applauds the entrepreneurial spirit of the virtuous woman (Proverbs 31:16–20).

Prayer for Protection

Lord, lead me to serve and guide others according to the integrity of my heart and by the skillfulness of my hands.

DAY 7

Empowering the Church

Every man who prays or prophesies with something on his head dishonors his head. Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.

1 Corinthians 11:4–5

Leadership Affirmation

I place a “10” on the forehead of each person whom You allow me to influence for Your glory.

Some churches operate beyond God’s design with women’s roles in ministry. But vastly more churches artificially limit both women and men from exercising the gifts that God gave them.

There are two areas God uniquely assigns to certain men in the church: *preaching ministry and pastoral ministry*. Beyond this specific leadership role assigned to those God calls for that specific purpose, men and women alike are gifted and commanded by the Lord to engage in active leadership and service.

Both men and women are to lead in teaching and mentoring ministries. Passages such as Titus 2:1–4 are clear that men and women are to mentor those who are younger in age and in the faith. You can teach without mentoring, but you can’t mentor without teaching. Men and women alike have a leadership responsibility in the church to teach God’s word and to invest in discipling men, women, and children in the congregation.

Both men and women are to lead in missions and discipleship ministries. The first evangelist to Samaria was an unnamed woman who, after encountering Jesus at Jacob’s well, went into town and shared the Gospel with both men and women, many of whom believed in Jesus as the Messiah. The former demon-possessed man from Gadara proclaimed the Lord’s mercy in the Gentile Ten Cities region, and the people were *all amazed*.

Both men and women are to lead in prayer and in prophesying. First Corinthians 11 gives a clear expectation that men will pray and prophesy in the church and that women will pray and prophesy in the church.

In summary, our world and our families need men to step up and be the husbands, fathers, and leaders in our homes, communities, and churches that God created them to be. It needs women to step up to be the wife, mother, and leader in our homes, communities, and churches that God created them to be.

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, lead me joyfully to be engaged in active ministry to those in my circle of influence.

What's IN Comes OUT: Days 8 through 14

During the days of His incarnation, from conception to ascension, Jesus' ministry was fully framed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Every ministry act, every teaching moment, and each step He took on the path to the cross flowed out the essence of who He was.

When He launched His ministry, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness of temptation (Matthew 4). Jesus emerged from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit, read from Isaiah's scroll of His anointing by the Spirit, and immediately spoke with authority (Luke 4). Following His resurrection, He declared that *all* authority was now His (Matthew 28).

Simply put, the authority for Jesus' ministry, teaching, and preaching was the natural extension of His inner being. Who He was inside flowed out in how He conducted Himself in both leadership and service. His essence was evidenced by His actions.

Jesus' active ministry spanned only three short years. While he often addressed large crowds, His core congregation would never be listed in the Fastest Growing Churches in America: twelve men, one of whom was not even a believer; a handful of women who supported His itinerate ministry from their limited resources; a slightly larger band of followers, many of whom who came together in an upper room for prayer following the Ascension; various friends and followers scattered across the regions of first century Israel.

So, what does authority in leadership look like? The most gripping illustration in the Gospels is found in John 13. Jesus, the leader of the band of followers we call disciples, humbled Himself before them in the form of a servant. This set of devotionals focuses on five attributes Jesus modeled when He washed the feet of His disciples: integrity, humility, love, courage, and perseverance.

How did this dynamic leader of such a small group of initial followers make the lasting impact that now influences billions across the world? His followers embraced the inner attributes that drove everything He did. The power of integrity, the sincerity of humility, the transparency of love, the resiliency of courage, and the inspiration of perseverance still resonate today.

When we lead like Jesus, we make a lasting impact that outlives our few years on earth. Our investments are in people, not things. The impact we leave behind is eternal, not temporal.

DAY 8

Leadership Is Influence ... Period!

After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them ... The whole assembly became silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul ... After they stopped speaking, James responded ... Then the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, decided ... For it was the Holy Spirit's decision — and ours ...

Acts 15:7-28

Leadership Affirmation

I willingly subject my opinion to wise counsel from fellow believers in Christ, not seeking to promote my agenda, but to influence others with the wisdom of the Spirit.

The scattered church came together in Jerusalem to consider the urgent question of what the Lord requires for people to be saved from their sins (Acts 15). After “much debate” at the Jerusalem Conference, four leaders rose to speak, the whole church *decided*, and the history of the world was *changed*! What happened in those few hours of time? A confluence of influence!

The simplest and most concise definition of leadership that I've found comes from John Maxwell: *Leadership is influence.*^{iv} Your capacity to influence the decisions and actions of others is the measure of your capacity to lead. Leadership asks the question, “How can I influence the people around me?” For believers, it is more specific: “How can I influence the people around me for the glory of God and their own good?”^v

God created men and women to make His glory known. In making His glory known, the human soul can be satisfied. So, what we really need to discover is how we can influence others so they can see the glory of God in us, in themselves, in what we engage in collectively and individually.

God's leadership flows from His essence. Our leadership, likewise, flows from within, from our character. It is not what we *do*. It is who we *are*. If we want to be effective leaders in our homes, churches, and communities, we must have the *character* to lead. Your *character* shapes your *attitudes*, how you *perceive* the people, situations, and ideas around you. And your *attitudes* drive your *actions*. You teach what you know, but you reproduce who you are.^{vi}

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, please protect me from the notion that my ideas are the best and from trying to carry them forward untested by the wise counsel of leaders who do not simply tell me what I want to hear.

DAY 9

Lead Like Jesus: Integrity

Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father ...

John 13:1

Leadership Affirmation

I live in full confidence that I am here for a reason and that You will use me to lead others until You determine the purpose for my life on earth has been fulfilled.

Great leaders have integrity. It's an attribute of their character. It's who they are. They know where they are going under the guiding hand of the Father. And they do not waver from their calling, no matter the cost.

The word "integrity" comes from the Latin word *integritas*.^{vii} We also get the word "integer" from this Latin root. You may remember from middle school that an integer is a whole number, meaning it's not fractional. An integer is not divided in any way.

That idea informs our understanding of integrity as a character attribute. Someone who has integrity is not divided. They are complete. The person with integrity behaves consistently in all areas of his or her life at all times. There are no double standards for a person with integrity.

Great leaders must have integrity. Integrity establishes credibility.^{viii} Credibility builds trust. Trust builds influence. When you trust your leaders, you're willing to follow them because of that trust factor.

The phrase *Jesus knew that his hour had come* puts His integrity on full display. Everything His life had been pointing toward was about to come to completion. From conception to the resurrection, the entirety of His life was an atoning work. The cross satisfied the penalty of the law. His sinless life satisfied the component of the law that demands adherence. There was never a single moment in Jesus' entire life where He wavered in His righteous code of ethics and principles. In both active and passive obedience, He was faultless.

We can pursue integrity, but we cannot fully possess it to the level of Jesus' perfection. We may see glimpses of integrity in humanity, but we see it perfectly in Jesus. He bore the full wrath of God for my sin and for your sin because that was the singular purpose for which He came. The righteousness He imputed to our account at our salvation becomes both the root and the fruit of our integrity.

Prayer for Protection

Heavenly Father, I resist satan's whispers that lure me from the high calling of integrity.

DAY 10

Serve Like Jesus: Humility

So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.

John 13:4–5

Leadership Affirmation

I humble myself before those I lead, even as Jesus humbled himself before those who looked to him for guidance.

Great leaders are humble. Jesus, the Son of God, took on the role of a servant by washing His disciples' feet, a task typically performed by the lowest servant. Jesus's action of washing the disciples' feet was outlandish.

Peter, to his credit, recognizes the outlandish action and initially wants no part of it. In the Jewish mind, this was a job so low that only the lowest *Gentile* slave should do it, with some insisting that no *Jewish* slave should be required to do this job.^{ix} If peers didn't wash one another's feet, certainly the Rabbi of a band of peripatetic disciples had no business with a towel and a basin of water.

We publicly acknowledge that Christian leadership isn't about position and power and control and personal prestige. But we still long to be the hero to those we serve.^x How easily we default to *acting* humble without necessarily *being* humble. We seem to have a carryover notion that being humble is a sign of weakness, that it is a wearying burden. Gene Wilkes addressed this in *Jesus on Leadership*. He heard a pastor say, "If we exalt ourselves, we will be humbled. If we humble ourselves, we will be exhausted."^{xi}

Humility doesn't mean being a doormat or having a low view of yourself. Rather, it is acknowledging that apart from the Spirit of God empowering us, we really can do nothing that has lasting value. God doesn't see us as lowly and pitiful. He sees us as needy and dependent and highly treasured. We are so treasured by God that He gave His only Son to redeem us. The humble leader accepts this God-given identity and mission.^{xii}

Our identity is in Jesus. And when we identify with him, we receive His word: *Truly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him* (John 13:16).

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord, deliver me from thinking of myself more highly than I ought to think.

DAY 11

Love Like Jesus: Love

Having loved his own who were in the world ...

John 13:1

Leadership Affirmation

I greet this day with love for those I lead, calling out their names in prayer to the Lord.

One of the shortest yet most profound sentences in the Bible simply declares *God is love* (1 John 4:8). This word is *agape*, an abstract noun the Greek philosophers thought was unattainable on the terrestrial level. Yet here it is fully embodied in Jesus Christ in an upper room filled with tired men and dusty feet.

Great leaders love those they serve. Every action Jesus took was motivated by love. This is an expression of His intrinsic nature. It is an attribute of deity. Though it is an abstract noun, it is better understood as the complete embodiment of every high and noble quality of self-giving, sacrifice, service, building up, and giving with no expectation of return.

The verse before *God is love* is another simple sentence: *Love is from God* (1 John 4:7). The only way we can truly love those we lead is to abide in the One who lavished His love on us. Yes, Jesus loved His band of followers: our verse for the day is clear, *having loved his own who were in the world*. But in His high priestly prayer just a few chapters later in John's Gospel, we read of Jesus' love for us as well (John 17:20–23).

The Holy Spirit led Paul to paint a picture of *agape* love with a series of descriptive terms: *Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).

How do we know God loves us? He *washed* (John 13:1–15). He *gave* (John 3:16). He *laid down* (1 John 3:16). He *demonstrates* (Romans 5:8–9). He *revealed*, coming to us that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9). Love is far more than a "feel good *feeling*." Love is an active *doing*. Great leaders love like Jesus loved. It's instinctive.

Prayer for Protection

Dear Lord Jesus, I pray for the well-being of those who question my motives, misunderstand my aims, and disagree with my ideas. Lead me to remember the servant is not above his Master.

DAY 12

Persevere Like Jesus: Perseverance

... he loved them to the end.

John 13:1

Leadership Affirmation

I intercede for those who oppose my leadership, asking the Lord to bless them.

Great leaders have perseverance. Jesus' love for his disciples was undiluted and undiminished. *He loved them to the end.*

Put another way, Jesus finished what he started. He remained steadfast in His mission, teaching and serving His disciples even as His crucifixion approached. The religious leaders sought to take His life, yet He steadfastly proceeded. He alone knew they could not take what He was about to freely give.

Perseverance is the quality of never giving up, of staying on mission to the very end. No matter what obstacles you may face. No matter what opposition you may encounter. We develop perseverance through understanding our purpose. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He never deviated from that purpose.

When we have a God-given purpose in leading others, we develop an unquenchable desire to achieve it and to bring those we lead along with us. Our life becomes focused by an inner desire to achieve something meaningful and to help others achieve something noble in their own lives.

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He spent hours pouring His last lessons into their hearts and minds, which we now know as The Upper Room Discourse. He knew that one of them was about to betray him, but He never faltered. He chose to endure the sufferings of betrayal, beatings, mockery, and even excruciating death for the joy He knew was on the other side of that borrowed tomb.

Above all, when we see one set of goals being reached, we begin asking the Lord what He wants next. Jesus knew His time with the disciples was short. But He also knew another Counselor (another, but of the same essence) would shortly come and lead them to even greater heights of ministry effectiveness (John 14:12–18). This ragged band of rugged men were about to change the world in ways no one could have possibly imagined!

Prayer for Protection

Father, even when my leadership is spurned by others, I receive each person as a gift from You to more fully fashion me into the image of Jesus Christ.

DAY 13

Advance Like Jesus: Courage

... keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Leadership Affirmation

I joyfully press on despite adversity, discouragements, and impudent looks on the faces of those I lead.

Great leaders have courage. As we saw in yesterday's devotional, Jesus loved His disciples to the end. And He knew what the end entailed. He knew what suffering awaited him. And He chose to do it anyway.

The cross has become commonplace as a beautiful piece of jewelry or decorative art in Western Christianity. But it was an inconceivable terror to First Century Jews. We can't begin to understand the full horror of the cross. Beyond the physical torture of it, and it was an excruciating way to die, but beyond that, during His hours on the cross, Jesus became the primary object of God's wrath against sin.

Isaiah 53:5–6 says, *But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all.*

We can read those verses, and we can appreciate them, but we can't understand their full weight. God's wrath rests on sinful men. We have transgressed a holy God. We are guilty, and we deserve every drop of wrath that we have coming to us. Jesus had the courage to take God's wrath for you and for me. He understood the fullness of what that meant. And He took it anyway. This is majestic courage.

If you want to be a leader, you must have courage. You're not going to have all the answers. You're going to have to make difficult decisions that will be deeply unpopular. You will suffer. People may even hate you.

If you don't have courage, if you're weak-kneed, if you're a "get-along, go-along" person, beg God to change you. The mission is too important and the task is too large for anything but our best for our Lord.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, in obedience to Your word, even when misunderstood, I refuse to respond with vindictiveness or vengeance.

DAY 14

Diotropes or Demetrius?

Diotropes, who loves to have first place among them, does not receive our authority... Everyone speaks well of Demetrius — even the truth itself. And we also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

3 John, verses 9 and 12

Leadership Affirmation

I will live this day so that truth itself will speak well of my thoughts, my actions, and my leadership of others.

If we want to lead like Jesus, if we want to influence and impact those around us, we must embody integrity, humility, love, perseverance, and courage. Sadly, not all leaders embody these attributes. In the shortest letter in the Bible (219 words in the original language^{xiii}), we find two men who stand as polar opposites with respect to what it means to lead like Jesus.

The aged John gave a strong word of caution about Diotropes, a man who rejected the authority of the Apostles and had an insatiable desire to hold a position of prominence in the church.

Just three verses later, John gave an equally strong word of affirmation about Demetrius: *Everyone speaks well of Demetrius—even the truth itself.* Then, as icing on the cake of honor, John wrote, *And we also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.* Oh, that those we lead would say this of us!

One of the most influential people in my life is a man named Cliff. He's a legendary high school football coach with state championships in his home county. He is in the football Hall of Fame at the university where he played. He's a great leader because of his character. Cliff has run his race well. He has integrity to the max.

I was a young pastor when I was called to Cliff's church. I had the *position* of leader, but Cliff was *the leader*. He led me. He invested in me. He helped me grow. Because of Cliff's leadership in my life, everything I do, every success that I enjoy, is due, in part, to him. That's the mark of a great leader.

You have people like that in your life. And God has called you to be that person in other people's lives! That's the kind of leader God has designed you to be.

Prayer for Protection

O Father, please deliver me from my natural tendency to crave prominence and preeminence.

CAUSAL, not CASUAL: Days 15 through 21

At a superficial level, the difference between the words *Causal* and *Casual* is where we place the letters ***us***. *Casual* Christianity will never have an enduring influence in people's lives. It leaves ***us*** unfulfilled, and it leaves others unconvinced. Why would other people want to be like ***us*** if we are not like Christ?

The Apostles understood this foundational principle of leadership. Paul stated it plainly in 1 Corinthians 11:1: *Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.* This principle is equally emphasized in the writings of Peter, John, and James. The writer of Hebrews instructs the congregation to be imitators of their leaders, with this important caveat: *As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:7–8).

The *cause* and effect are clear. *Causal* leadership is grounded in the attributes of Jesus manifested in His leadership on earth. They are also grounded in attitudes that naturally extend from those attributes.

This past week, we reviewed five attributes of humble leadership when Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13). This week, we see the natural extension of those attributes.

As Jesus wound down His later Porean ministry, He set His face toward the Cross. On that final journey to Jerusalem, He delivered a stirring “teachable moment” lesson to His peripatetic band of followers. This lesson is preserved for our benefit in Mark 10:35–45, with the parallel teaching in Matthew 20:20–28. Each *attribute* we saw in John 13 has a corresponding *attitude* we see in Mark 10/Matthew 20.

The *attribute* of integrity begets the *attitude* of trustworthiness. The *attribute* of humility produces the *attitude* of servant-heartedness. The *attribute* of love engenders the *attitude* of empathy. The *attribute* of courage fuels the *attitude* of resilience. The *attribute* of perseverance yields the *attitude* of diligence. Cause and effect, pure and simple.

When we lead like Jesus, the ***us*** of who we are *in Christ* reflects the ***He*** of who He is *in us*. This is the kind of cause-and-effect leadership that inspires people in every generation to become followers of us even as we are followers of Jesus. It is an expression of the inner person of the heart that leads to eternal transformation in the lives of those we lead.

DAY 15

Attitudes Determine Outcomes

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, ... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even to death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5–8

Leadership Affirmation

When others follow me, I model what it looks like to follow Christ.

Before I was a pastor, I worked in radiology. I had a patient come in for an MRI one day. It was the end of the day, and she was the last patient on the schedule, so when I finished her scan, I got to go home. She came in for an MRI of her brain. She was 36 years old and had been having headaches for a few months.

She was a good patient, following every instruction perfectly. The problem was her husband and kids. All three of her children were under the age of ten. They started running, screaming, and jumping off chairs in the waiting room, knocking a picture off the wall that shattered on impact. When I heard the crash, I got up to make sure everything was okay. The husband was just sitting in a chair watching TV. He looked up and said to me, “They just broke your picture. What are you going to do? Boys will be boys.”

I stared at him for a minute with a look of disgust on my face, trying to beam a subliminal message into his brain. He didn’t get it. Moments later, I heard another crash. I got back up and found one of the boys had climbed up on the crash cart and knocked the defibrillator off. At this point, I’m mad. I just want to go home.

But then something changed. Her images started coming up. She had a massive brain tumor. It was the most aggressive form of brain cancer. I slumped back in my chair. I just sat there for a minute. The kids had started getting rowdy again. This time, though, I wasn’t annoyed by them. My heart hurt for them because I knew the moment I got their mom off the exam table, their entire world was about to be turned upside-down.

The only thing that changed for me was my attitude. Your attitude determines your actions. When you are presented with situations, ideas, or people, your attitude towards them will dictate how you respond in the moment. Your attributes determine your attitude, and your attitudes drive your actions.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, please protect me from any temptation or distraction that pulls my attention away from the noble calling of leading with the mind and heart of Christ.

DAY 16

Integrity Begets Trustworthiness

Taking the twelve aside, he began to tell them the things that would happen to him.

Mark 10:32

Leadership Affirmation

I lead by speaking truth in a manner worthy of the trust Jesus has invested in me.

Jesus had many “teaching moments” with His disciples. They were just like us in so many ways, always clamoring for recognition and attention. That is the scene that unfolds in Mark 10. Jesus and His disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem.

As they journeyed, Jesus openly shared with His disciples about His impending suffering, death, and resurrection. He was open and honest, not trying to cover it up so that they wouldn’t abandon him. No subterfuge. No hidden agenda. No secret meetings. Just openness, honesty, and transparency.

Jesus has the attribute of integrity, which manifested as the attitude of trustworthiness. We can trust Jesus. And we can trust people with integrity because people with integrity behave in a trustworthy manner.

Our character is always on display. When we’re put in a stressful situation, our character is amplified. When we make difficult decisions on the spot, our instincts force us to make choices that are true to our nature.

An untrustworthy person will be unreliable. Untrustworthy people get defensive and make excuses. Untrustworthy people will lie and cheat to get ahead. Unfortunately, that too often describes our own leadership, whether at home, at church, or in the community.

When you contrast this with Jesus, you see that He has integrity to the max. He is trustworthy in how He deals with people. Jesus is open. Jesus is honest. Jesus is transparent. He owns His role. He doesn’t make promises He can’t keep. He isn’t harsh. He always tempered His speech with grace.

We all have these integrity failures, but not Jesus. When we lead like Jesus, every situation is an opportunity to build trust, to be open and honest, to behave in a manner that is internally consistent with *His* character working its way through our lives as we surrender more fully to Him each day.

Prayer for Protection

Father, I refuse to pattern my life after the leadership principles of those who do not know You.

DAY 17

Humility Produces Servant-Heartedness

Whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all.

Mark 10:43–44

Leadership Affirmation

I look for and seize opportunities to serve in ways that no one will notice or, if so, think noteworthy.

This teachable moment with the disciples was precipitated by the natural impulse for recognition and status. James and John approached Jesus with a desire to sit in positions of prominence (Mark 10:37). This passage reveals several things about pride.

Pride manifests itself in *selfish ambition*. In Matthew's account of this incident, James and John have their mother with them, too (Matthew 20:20–21). Their mother, Salome, is the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus.^{xiv} As Jesus' cousins and aunt, they don't hesitate to exploit a familial connection for their own benefit.

Pride manifests itself in *arrogant overconfidence*. Jesus asked the two brothers, *Do you really think you can do what I'm about to do?* James and John arrogantly replied, *We are able.*

Pride manifests itself in *bitter rivalry*. The other ten weren't about to let this slide. They got angry because they felt like James and John were trying to usurp them (Mark 10:41). This rivalry among the disciples continued to fester up and even during the Last Supper, where they disputed among themselves which of them was considered the greatest (Luke 22:24).

By contrast, Jesus' attribute of humility produces the attitude of servant-heartedness. He used this teachable moment to flip their cultural understanding of leadership. If you want to be a leader, He said, you must become a slave by serving those around you. Humble leaders are not prideful. They recognize that true leadership is about serving others, not promoting the leader's personal wants and desires.

In summary, Jesus both declared and modelled that humble leaders have an attitude of servant-heartedness that manifests itself in sacrificial service. A humble leader stoops the lowest and elevates the highest.

Prayer for Protection

Father, with chagrin, I confess my tendency to secretly look over my shoulder to see if others noticed my service.

DAY 18

Love Engenders Empathy

When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9:36

Leadership Affirmation

I will invest in an individual today who does not know I am a leader. I will help them discover they are of great worth to our amazing God through the grace of Jesus Christ His Son.

The attribute of love produces the attitude of empathy. The natural inclination of leaders who love people is to see things from their perspective, to understand and share their feelings. They are not harsh.

When James and John made an outlandishly arrogant request of Jesus, His response dripped with empathy. Jesus listened to their request. He understood their hearts, their desires, their ambitions, though wrong-headed as they are. And Jesus gently redirected them.

Jesus is a master of empathy. He has compassion for our *spiritual condition* (Matthew 9:36). He has compassion for our *physical condition* (Matthew 14:14). Jesus has compassion for our *emotional condition*. When Jesus arrived at Lazarus's tomb, we find the shortest verse in the Bible: *Jesus wept* (John 11:35).

Jesus' weeping carried a deeper intensity and had a different focus from the others.^{xv} Mary and the others were lamenting loudly over their sense of loss; Jesus silently burst into tears at the heartache of His friends.^{xvi}

Have you experienced grief so great that you couldn't breathe? It's been well said that in that moment, Jesus looked back and forth across the corridors of time and saw all the grief and brokenness that humanity would ever feel because of the effects of sin. It grieved Him to the core, and He wept bitterly.^{xvii}

Empathetic leaders create an environment of support and encouragement, of trust and safety. They celebrate our successes and provide encouragement during our failures. They're always there for us to pick us up when we're down. That's Jesus. And that is us when we lead like Jesus leads.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, following in the footsteps of Jesus, I refuse to let the vastness of human need deter me from helping the ones I can.

DAY 19

Courage Fuels Resilience

When the days were coming to a close for him to be taken up, he determined to journey to Jerusalem [literally, *stiffened his face* to journey].

Luke 9:51

Leadership Affirmation

I lean into my leadership responsibilities regardless of circumstances, setting, or how I may be received by others.

On this trip toward Jerusalem and His imminent death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus' courage and resultant resilience were on full display. Resilience is the ability to withstand challenges and recover quickly from difficulties. It's the capacity to persevere through trials and stay true to the mission.

At this point in their journey with Jesus, His disciples don't yet have courage. False bravado? Yes. Courage and resilience? No. James and John said they were able to drink Jesus' cup. Peter promised he would never deny Jesus. You can have bravado when you're not under stress, but everything changes when you enter the Garden of Gethsemane and stand in the court of judgment. When it really mattered, each one fled.

When we lack resilience, we struggle in the face of stress and adversity. We are easily overwhelmed. Our lives are marked by avoidance and outright cowardice. We run. We hide. We develop a negative outlook. We become "Spiritual Eeyores," moping along in life like the fictional Winnie the Pooh character.

Then we look at Jesus! Jesus was singularly focused on achieving the most brutal task in human history. He set His face like flint and stepped courageously forward. There was no adversity He wouldn't plow through. There was no obstacle He wouldn't overcome. And there was no barrier that would hold Him back.

Though the disciples failed that initial resiliency test, Jesus was not finished with them. Within a few months, Peter and John were threatened for preaching about Jesus. They continued proclaiming the gospel. James, who had made his false brag, became obedient to death and helped fuel the advance of the Gospel.

True resilience is not about "toughing it out." It is grounded in the spiritual attribute of courage that comes from a daily submission to the Holy Spirit. Don't stop pursuing your God-given roles and dreams!

Prayer for Protection

Father, when satan whispers that no faithful child of God should face opposition. I flee to You and find refuge.

DAY 20

Perseverance Yields Diligence

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Leadership Affirmation

I fulfill my leadership responsibilities with excellence, even when no one is watching.

The Mark 10 teachable moment led into Jesus' bold declaration of His substitutionary atonement: *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). The key words in this verse flow directly out of Isaiah 53: *to serve; to give; his life; a ransom; for; the many.*^{xviii}

Jesus set the standard for serving. He provides motivation for service. But He did more. Jesus did what we cannot do for ourselves (purchased our redemption) in order that, in Him, we can do what we otherwise would not want to do (serve selflessly).

I don't think we fully appreciate how difficult a task Jesus accomplished for us. Hebrews 4:15 lifts up the perfect sinlessness of Jesus. There is no trial, no testing, no temptation we face that Jesus did not also experience. Jesus grew tired. Jesus took needed breaks. We see Jesus broken and grieved. We see Jesus suffer.

Jesus was tempted in every way we are tempted, so He can fully sympathize with *our* weaknesses. Yet, He did not sin. As the sinless One, He was able to pay the full penalty we, as unrighteous, deserved (1 Peter 3:18).

The attribute of perseverance yields unrelenting diligence. Diligence is the spiritual discipline to get up every day and do what's necessary to fulfill your mission. Leaders who lack diligence have inconsistent preparation. They neglect their responsibilities, procrastinate, have poor follow-through, and are disorganized. They are rarely prepared for unexpected situations.

But we never see Jesus stop even once in His singular pursuit to give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus got up every day and stepped into the mission that brought Him to earth, never once shrinking back, even when agonizing in prayer. He never quit. He never hit the pause button. He never faltered. He literally gave His all!

Prayer for Protection

Dear Jesus, I reject the false pride that tempts me to offer less than my best in my service for you.

DAY 21

A Life-Defining Moment

But it is not so among you. On the contrary ...

Mark 10:43

Leadership Affirmation

I gladly accept the role of servant-hearted leadership, viewing no task as “beneath me.”

Jesus turned the disciples' world upside down in so many ways. He taught that to be forgiven, one must forgive. To receive, one must give. To be first, one must be last. To live, one must die. To be served, one must serve. His teaching was 100 percent contrary to the way things work in the fallen world. If we are to lead like Jesus, we must get rid of some notions about leadership that are not true.

Leadership is not position.^{xix} Leadership really has nothing to do with the position you occupy or a position someone occupies over you. It is based fully on the trust you inspire through the service you render.

Leadership is not personality. We tend to think that you have to have a charismatic personality to be a great leader. Abraham Lincoln, widely regarded as one of the greatest presidents in the history of our nation, was an introvert, viewed by his own party as lacking sufficient intellect to run the nation. He is one of thousands of historical examples showing there is no correlation between personality type and leadership effectiveness.

Leadership is not popularity. The idea of leadership as a popularity contest is instilled in us as children. The popular kids are seen as leaders, so we wrongly conclude the most popular people are the best leaders.

Leadership is not power. So many who want to be leaders really crave power to do what they want to do and to control other people. Jesus used two strong words to describe what the world views as leadership: *katakyrieo* (lord it down over) and *katexousiazo* (authoritarian-ize), both prefixed with *kata*, an intensifier.^{xx} He then declared, *it is not so among you!* True leadership is not about advancing yourself; it is serving others.

Leadership is not private or personal. Effective Christian leader is not about me and my personal success. It's about you and how I can help you become what God called you to be. Within a matter of weeks, this mind-blowing, life-defining moment transformed this motley band into world-changers for God's glory!

Prayer for Protection

Precious Spirit, I repudiate the lust for control that characterizes what too many view as leadership.

The IMPROBABLES: Days 22 through 28

We live in the day of superheroes. They seem to resurface every few years in ever new iterations through big-screen releases, television series, comic books, video games, and novels. Both collectively and individually, they have names that excite the masses. They almost always have superpowers, wear distinctive clothing (often with capes and masks), and are known on sight by the youngest child and the most seasoned adult.

There is something compelling about having an identity that elicits trust, awe, and excitement. If James and John were living today, they might wear matching leather jackets with the name BOANERGES emblazoned across the back. I can only imagine how they reveled in this nickname Jesus gave them (Mark 3:17).

Jesus was in the renaming business! He saw things in people that they did not see in themselves. Jesus saw a *rock* in Simon and renamed him Peter. The Lord saw *multitudes* in fatherless Abram and changed his name to Abraham. He saw *universal nobility* in Sarai, and she became Sarah. He saw *perseverance* in Jacob and declared he would henceforth be known as Israel. The Apostles saw *humility* in the Jewish Saul and called him Paul in recognition of his missionary calling by Jesus to reach the nations with the gospel.

If Christian leaders could be aggregated under a single banner, what would it be? Quite possibly, it would be The Improbables! Paul burst any bubble we may have had in his First Epistle to the church at Corinth:

Brothers and sisters, consider your calling: Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one may boast in his presence. (1 Corinthians 1:6-29)

This fourth grouping of devotionals is drawn from the ministry of a man named Joseph, a Levite who was born on the island of Cyprus. When the church at Jerusalem was still in its infancy as the first church plant, the Apostles gave this Joseph a new name. They called him Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement. Barnabas is clearly *The Greatest Leader You've Never Heard Of*. A case study of Barnabas's servant leadership reveals the massive impact one person can have on the world around them, despite not being front and center. Barnabas is the quintessential "legend-making leader."

DAY 22

An Unlikely List

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.”

1 Samuel 16:7

Leadership Affirmation

I marvel that the Lord loves me so much He not only welcomes me into His family; He also trusts me to lead others for His glory.

The God of the Bible has a rather awkward habit of choosing all the wrong people as leaders. He consistently picks ones no one else would hire. He doesn't seem interested in résumés. Take *Moses*, for example. When we meet him in Exodus, he's not exactly brimming with spiritual confidence. And yet, God calls him.

Moses' first question is a good one: *Who am I?* *Moses* sees the gap between what God is asking and what he feels capable of doing. Here's the truth: the gap is real. *Moses* is not capable. He's not a great public speaker. He's been off the grid for decades. And God doesn't really answer *Moses*. He simply says, *I will be with you*.

That's it. That's the resume. Presence, not performance. God doesn't need our qualifications. He supplies what we lack. So, if you feel unqualified, you're in excellent biblical company.

The Bible is packed with divine head-scratchers: *Gideon*, hiding in a winepress, calling himself the least of the least. *Rahab*, a prostitute turned protector of Israel's spies who became the great-grandmother of the everlasting line of royalty. *Peter*, a loudmouth fisherman with a habit of saying the wrong thing at the worst time. *Paul*, a former Christian killer turned missionary extraordinaire.

Then there's *David*. Neither his dad *Jesse* nor the prophet-judge *Samuel* saw much to look at. But God told *Samuel* to look a little deeper. *David* had bigger, taller, older brothers. But it was *David* who stepped out in the Valley of Elah to face *Goliath*, knowing that the victory belongs to the Lord (1 Samuel 17:45–47).

God doesn't call us because of who we are. He calls us because of Who He Is! So if you've ever thought, “Surely not me,” take heart. That's exactly the kind of person God tends to choose.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, at times, Your trust in me to lead fills me with false pride, which I confessionally reject and give over to You.

DAY 23

People-Lovers: Legendary Leader 1

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus by birth, the one the apostles called Barnabas (which is translated Son of Encouragement) ...

Acts 4:36

Leadership Affirmation

I build up others through every means possible, whether speaking, serving, or leading them to follow Jesus.

Legend-making leaders love people. They want to see other people blessed. We are introduced to a man like this in Acts 4. His name was Joseph. He was from the island of Cyprus.

The early days of the church in Jerusalem were marked by exponential growth, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The Lord was multiplying the church, and there was a sweet spirit of unity. Luke reported in Acts 4:32 that the people were of “one heart and one soul” and that they “had everything in common.”

The Greek word for “common” is the root word for *koinonia*. It means fellowship, communion, partners, and partakers. This is the same relationship believers have with the Lord. All the resources of God are at the disposal of the child of God. ^{xxi}

That’s how it was in the early church. People gave sacrificially so that others would be blessed. Joseph of Cyprus sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. Why did he do this? Acts 4:34 says it was to meet the needs of the poor in the burgeoning Christian community.

Joseph became so synonymous with his behind-the-scenes generosity that the Apostles began to call him Barnabas, the *son of encouragement*. The name stuck. Few today know him by his given name, but most active Christ-followers know his nickname and his reputation.

What if people only called you by what you are best known for? What might that be? Ask your kids. Ask your family. Ask people at church. Their answers will give a pretty good view of your underlying priorities.

Barnabas loved people. Legend-making leaders do this instinctively. They are not interested in power, position, or personal accolades. They just love people and do what they can to lift them up.

Prayer for Protection

O Lord Jesus, deliver me from the sinful practice of tearing others down, whether in public settings or one-on-one.

DAY 24

Risk-Takers: Legendary Leader 2

Barnabas, however, took him [Saul] and brought him to the apostles ...

Acts 9:27

Leadership Affirmation

I see seams of gold coursing through others' lives, knowing the value they have to the Lord and willingly invest in their lives for His purposes.

Legend-making leaders are risk-takers. We see this the second time Barnabas appears on the pages of Scripture. Barnabas chooses to invest his life in a man few others trusted. We know the back story of Saul, the man who would become the Apostle Paul. He was a vicious man. He persecuted Christians. He arrested Christians. He murdered Christians. Then Jesus showed up.

That's the story of all of us. We were all enemies of Christ, but then Jesus showed up and changed our hearts.

That's what Jesus did for Paul. He changed his heart. But for the Lord to use him more fully, He needed to change the hearts of others, too. God's solution to his "Saul problem" was Barnabas. Barnabas loved people, and he was willing to take a risk on this former Pharisee. The emphasis behind the first part of verse 27, *Barnabas took him and brought him*, is that Barnabas took him under his wing as his mentor.^{xxii}

And this isn't the only time Barnabas took a chance on Saul. He watched as Paul grew. When he saw further evidence of Paul's growth, Barnabas took another chance on him. The church in Antioch commissioned Barnabas to be a missionary. He was going to go on the first missionary journey, travel around, and plant churches. Faced with this challenge, Barnabas says, "Go get me, Saul."

Barnabas wasn't reckless with Saul. You can't elevate people without evidence that the Lord is at work in their life. But because Barnabas was willing to take a calculated risk on Saul, the church accepted him, his ministry flourished, and God used him to spread the gospel among the nations.

Legend-making leaders are always looking for the best in people. They are always looking for potential. And they're always willing to take calculated risks with people. Don't be quick to dismiss a vessel God may use. Look for ways to elevate them, grow them, and invest in them, even if they have a back story from their past.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, I refuse to join the chorus of naysayers about the ministry potential of any individual.

DAY 25

Grace-Revealers: Legendary Leader 3

Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

Acts 11:25–26

Leadership Affirmation

I constantly develop leaders by providing them opportunities to serve others and grow in their leadership and ministry skills.

Legend-making leaders are grace-revealers. Not only do they love people and take risks on others, but they are also quick to show grace.

Saul had been consenting in the persecution that led to the scattering of the early church to other cities. Some of those believers planted a church in Antioch. When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard about the growing church there, they dispatched Barnabas to bring a report about what the Lord was doing. Acts 11:23 records that when he arrived at Antioch, he saw “the grace of God,” and he was glad.

Grace is an amazing term. It speaks of our salvation. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. But God shows us grace in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). When Barnabas arrived, he saw the goodness of God on full display. Legend-making leaders rejoice when they see God’s grace at work. But they are also eager to show grace to others, enlisting and encouraging them to do ministry in the name of Jesus.

Barnabas could have been bitter at Saul for wreaking havoc on the lives of people that Barnabas loved. But he saw grace at work and rejoiced. He immediately went to Tarsus to bring Saul to Antioch to show him how God had turned what Saul and others had meant for evil into a greater good for the Kingdom of God. This illustrates the story of another Joseph: what his brothers meant for evil, God meant for good (Genesis 50:20).

For a year, Barnabas and Saul taught “a great many people.” It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). As a consequence of Barnabas’s investment in others and the amazing grace he showed, we are called Christians to this day. Legend-making leaders are grace-revealers.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, I refuse to be controlled by prejudice when someone You call seems an unlikely candidate to me.

DAY 26

Prominence-Pushers: Legendary Leader 4

As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” … But Saul — also called Paul — filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at Elymas and said, “You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery, you son of the devil and enemy of all that is right. Won’t you ever stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord?”

Acts 13:2, 9–10

Leadership Affirmation

I find joy when those I have mentored for leadership outshine me in their service for Christ.

Legend-making leaders are prominence-pushers. They long for others to succeed, even if it means they are obscured by the brilliant light of those they trained in ministry. They are not interested in their own glory.

Barnabas could have been a big deal in Antioch. The church was growing. Converts were everywhere. Because of his ministry, the church was healthy. The believers there were known as imitators of Jesus. He could have settled down in a position of prominence as pastor of the largest church in the area.

The fourth time we see Barnabas in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit sets him and Paul aside for a missionary journey (Acts 13). Up until this point, Barnabas is the leader, always named first. When they arrived on Barnabas’s home island of Cyprus, the proconsul of Paphos invited Barnabas and Saul to speak the word of God. As they spoke, Elymas the magician tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

Without hesitation, Paul stepped to the forefront, boldly declaring *You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery, you son of the devil and enemy of all that is right* (Acts 13:10). Calling someone a son of the devil, the enemy of righteousness, full of deceit and villainy doesn’t seem in keeping with Barnabas’s nature. But it very much is in Paul’s nature. The powerful force of Paul’s personality catapulted him to prominence.

This is the moment that Paul became the leader. Barnabas begins fading into the background. For the rest of their time together, Barnabas’s strategy was consistent: he kept pushing this dynamic young preacher out front at the expense of his own glory and his own brand. As a prominence-pushing, legend-making leader, Barnabas’s shadow on history is almost obliterated by the blinding light of Paul’s star.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, deliver me from resentment when my Timothys find greater prominence in Kingdom work than I’ve achieved.

DAY 27

Failure-Redeemers: Legendary Leader 5

Barnabas wanted to take along John who was called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed off to Cyprus.

Acts 15:37–39

Leadership Affirmation

I look for the best in every person, wondering how God wants to use them for His glory.

Legend-Making Leaders are Failure-Redeemers. The last reference to Barnabas in the book of Acts comes on the heels of the Jerusalem Conference. The Apostles assembled leaders from the churches to discuss the nature of salvation. After much debate, “the apostles and the elders and the whole church” settled once and for all the “grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone” certainty of God’s salvation for all people. They penned a letter to be delivered to all the churches (Acts 15:1–29).

Paul and Barnabas took the letter to Antioch, where they remained for a ministry visit. Then Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return to the churches they had planted on their first missionary journey. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. Paul disagreed since Mark had abandoned the mission team on their first journey. When they could not reach an agreement, they went their separate ways. Paul and Silas took the northern route to Asia Minor while Barnabas and Mark returned to Cyprus (Acts 15:36–41). In God’s sovereignty, the team broke up, but the ministry multiplied.

Barnabas, true to his nature, is always looking for a way to show grace. Paul, true to his nature, isn’t willing to trust Mark with that level of responsibility until he earns it back. The men reach an impasse: Barnabas isn’t going without him, and Paul isn’t going with him. So, they separated.

Barnabas was able to redeem Mark for effective ministry. Mark later traveled with Peter. Mark wrote the first of the four Gospels. Barnabas even redeemed Mark in the eyes of Paul (2 Timothy 4:11). Legend-making leaders seek to redeem failures for future usefulness in the Kingdom.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, let me see with Your eyes, refusing to believe a young leader’s potential is defined by failure in previous service.

DAY 28

Who's Your One?

There was also a prophetess, Anna. ... She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers. At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:36–38

Leadership Affirmation

I believe God uses seemingly insignificant people to make lasting impressions of God's grace on others.

It must be obvious by now. Though Paul is my hero, I view Barnabas as *The Greatest Leader You've Never Heard Of*. Unless you drill down into his life, you may miss it.

Sitting at the intersection between Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and Mesopotamia, Antioch was one of the most strategic cities in the ancient world. The church planted there was strategic in the rapid expansion of the Christian movement. Barnabas, a leader in the evangelistic and missionary growth of this church, became a catalyst for the first church-planting movement. As the team leader of the first mission trip, he either directly or indirectly accounts for at least fourteen church plants, probably more.

Then, because Barnabas invested in and elevated his team member Paul, we see his generational influence through Paul on other leaders such as Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, Silas, Priscilla, Aquilla, Luke, and others. When he and Paul created new teams for the second missionary journey, Barnabas chose John Mark.

From Paul, we get thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. His protégé Luke contributed the early church history we call *The Acts of the Apostles* as a sequel to his Gospel. John Mark, of course, wrote the Gospel of Mark, which many believe heavily influenced the Gospels penned by Matthew and Luke.

Equally buried in the pages of the New Testament, an aged widow named Anna encouraged a young married couple on their first visit to the Temple to dedicate their newborn son. She not only spoke encouragement to this young couple, but she also became one of the first evangelists in the city of Jerusalem, where the first church would be planted some thirty years later. Whether speaking into the life of a young couple or mentoring a man who becomes an outstanding leader, God is calling you to be a legacy-making leader of others!

Prayer for Protection

Father, lead me to value the many servants of Christ whom some see as "lower rowers" in God's family of faith.

A Flag to Follow: Days 29 through 35

Christian leadership, whether influencing people or coming alongside them and elevating them for the glory of God, is how we leave our mark on the world. We are hardwired from creation to want that.

We long for our values to be passed down to the next generation, beginning at home, then extending outward, making a positive impact that outlives our years on Earth.

On August 21, 2021, seventeen inches of rain fell across middle Tennessee in less than twenty-four hours. All that rain in such a short amount of time created catastrophic flooding. Waverly, a small town in Middle Tennessee, was devastated. Flash floods swept through the middle of this small town, killing twenty people. The entire town was devastated. Homes were gone. Schools were lost. Lives were upended.

When the sun came up the next morning and we could survey the damage, it was unimaginable. In an instant, people lost, not just their houses, but their homes, where they had watched their kids take their first steps, where they had spent decades making memories. I met a young mother with a blank look on her face, holding her little girl, staring off into space. I offered her a bottle of water and asked what we could do to help. She looked up at me and, with tears running down her face, she sobbed, “I’ve lost everything.”

I also saw something else. Hundreds of volunteers in yellow shirts were scurrying around helping people. These were Tennessee Baptists, followers of Jesus Christ, volunteering through Tennessee Baptist Disaster Relief to serve people facing unimaginable loss. You’ll never know their names, but they showed up to help people they did not know at the point of their greatest need. Rallying around the Cross of Christ, they rushed into the fray of human devastation, loss, brokenness, and deep spiritual need.

They were there because, in 1902, two Tennessee Baptist Church members saw the needs in their generation and decided to do something. W.C. and Mildred Golden started what would become the Golden Offering for Tennessee Missions. This faithful couple left a legacy. They saw a need, and they took the initiative to build something that has far outlived them.

That’s Christian leadership. It is not about accessory things that the world thinks are necessary to be a leader. Christian leadership is about character spilling out into action, becoming the person God designed you to be, and doing the things God called you to do. When we do that, we create a legacy that outlives us.

DAY 29

The Highest Calling!

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.

2 Corinthians 5:20

Leadership Affirmation

My authority to lead rests in my assignment as a personal representative of the King of kings.

We have a mandate to represent our Sovereign Lord Jesus to others, investing our lives in the people around us. This great and high calling is a commission given to every follower of Jesus: To lead others to know Christ.

The word translated “ambassador” in 2 Corinthians 5:20 is a verb. It is not a noun that defines what we are. It is an action word that describes what we do. As our Sovereign, the Lord has commissioned us to *do* what ambassadors *do*. We carry His terms of peace to those who are estranged from God.

God has brought forth reconciliation through Jesus’ atonement. The mission of reconciliation takes place through making disciples (Matthew 28:19). We “ambassadorize” by conveying this singular message from God, serving under His authority, speaking on His behalf, explaining His terms of reconciliation over and over. As people are being discipled, they are converted. Evangelism and discipleship are not linear concepts. One does not follow the other. One does not “get saved” and then become a disciple.

We intuitively understand this when leading our children. We invest in our children long before they make a public profession of faith, don’t we? The moment my boys were born, we started reading them Bible stories at bedtime every night. We started teaching them how to think and act in godly ways. We brought them to church. We discipled them before they were saved. One day, during this disciple-making process, they responded to the Lord with faith and obedience to His effectual call, followed by believer’s baptism. We continue to teach them to observe all that Jesus commanded us in this ongoing disciple-making process.

Your leadership mission is to invest your life in people, to come alongside them, to convey God’s reconciling word to them. God did not call us to make decisions. He called us to make disciples. This is the highest calling of leadership. Not everyone can be or will be a public speaker. But every Christ-follower can be positionally available and personally surrendered, willing to do what God wants you to do.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, I confess my leadership potential is limited when I refuse to subject my desires to Your plans.

DAY 30

Mandated to Go

*All authority ... Matthew 28:18 | Go, therefore ... Matthew 28:19 | You will be my witnesses
... Acts 1:8*

Leadership Affirmation

I lead with authority because my leadership priorities fully accord with the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus.

We don't often think of the Great Commission as a leadership mandate, but it is. If Christian leadership is influencing people for the glory of God, then the Great Commission sits at the heart of leadership.

And it is a mandate, not a command. A command implies we are simply told to do something. A mandate carries with it the idea that we are sent under the authority of our Sovereign, endued with His authority to bring it about. That's the Great Commission.

I don't think it's hyperbole to say that, in its broadest sense, the Great Commission is the focal point of all of Scripture.^{xxiii} Jesus came on a mission to seek and save the lost. He gives us a mandate to join Him on His mission. The Great Commission, then, is legacy-building at its peak.

The tragic reality is that the vast majority of believers in the church are NPC's when it comes to the mission of the church. Video games have playable characters and non-playable characters. The playable character is on a mission. An NPC is a non-playable character. They stand around in the background. They contribute to the environment. You can talk to some of them, but they are not directly involved in the mission.

An unengaged Christian is an oxymoron. They are contradictory terms. Unengaged Christians, Christians who are not engaged in the mission that Christ gives us, cannot exist. Jesus said, *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word* (John 14:23). This is the chief business that we are to be about.

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus stated, *All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth*. In verse 19, Jesus mandated, *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations*.

The point is simple. Jesus has all authority, and He delegates that authority to us and sends us out on the same mission that He came to accomplish. He is inviting us to be leaders in His mission to seek and save the lost. That's the mandate of the leader.

Prayer for Protection

Dear Spirit, please deliver me from manipulation or subterfuge to accomplish my leadership objectives.

DAY 31

Mission Matters Most

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.

Matthew 28:19–20

Leadership Affirmation

My primary leadership role today is to make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

I heard Adrian Rogers tell a story years ago about a meat-packing company founder. He was a Christian who knew he was on mission with his Sovereign Savior, Jesus Christ. One day, he met someone who didn't know him, and they asked him what he did for a living. He replied, "My chief business is to bring men to Jesus Christ. I pack meat on the side to make a living."

It does not matter whether you are a doctor, lawyer, banker, nurse, contractor, pastor, or factory worker. Our chief business is the business of bringing people to Jesus. Everything else is secondary.

We see this in the Great Commission. The Great Commission is more than a mandate to go. It is a mandate to lead. The Great Commission is a mandate to be a leader in Christ's work.

We lead through availability. There is an old preacher line that says, "The greatest ability is availability." Availability is a superpower. The smartest, the most charismatic, the most powerful, and the most gifted people in the world are useless to the Lord if they are not available to participate in His mission.

We lead through attitude. In the verse that precedes the Great Commission, Matthew reported, *And when they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted* (Matthew 28:17). Not only does your availability matter, but your attitude matters. The disciples have an attitude of worship. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves in humble adoration before the Lord. This is the posture of their heart towards Jesus.

To serve him, then, we must have an attitude of humility, adoration, and surrender to His authority. Many Christians are engaged in a variety of good and noble things. The most important thing is to stay on mission, to be an agent of reconciliation, to invest in others, to make disciples. Mission matters most!

Prayer for Protection

Lord, with You to guide me, I will not do ministry alone, not today, not ever again.

DAY 32

A Promise to Receive

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:20

Leadership Affirmation

I surrender my leadership fears to the second imperative verb of the Great Commission.

I've often heard there is only one verb in the Great Commission: the imperative verb "make disciples." There is, in fact, a second verb, also an imperative. The imperative mood is used to give commands, often with an implied and emphatic *You!* as the subject.

Imperative verb number one states our *mission*: As we go about our duties each day, we are intentionally focused on making disciples. Each day, we seek opportunities to deepen our relationships with someone we are discipling. Each day, we seize the opportunity to deliver a reconciling word into their lives. That's the mission. It's not complex. It is straightforward. Go and make disciples.

Imperative verb number two states our *mindset*: We must remember who our Sovereign is, the extent of our Sovereign's domain, and how our Sovereign equips and enables His children. This imperative verb is variously translated *Lo!* Or *Behold!* Or *Remember!* It is not a mere reminder to remember a fact; it is an attention-grabbing command to *take notice* of a promise: You are not going on mission alone!

On the basis of His resurrection, Jesus announced that He had been given absolute and ultimate authority. His authority is not limited by the geopolitical lines that separate nations. It is universal. There is nowhere we can go that His authority does not hold sway. There is no one in heaven or on earth who is not subject to His sovereign reign. There is nowhere we can go where His reconciling word will not be persuasive. In effect, Jesus said, *Remember! I am investing the full weight and power of heaven itself in you and your words as you speak reconciliation to those who are alienated and estranged. I, even I, will be with you!*

As crucial as the mandate is and as important as the mission is, the method of accomplishment is grounded in the presence of Jesus Himself. We have the promise of both His power and His presence. We are not called to accomplish the mission in a vacuum. Jesus invests His authority in us and through us. *Lo! I am with you!*

Prayer for Protection

Father, no storms can assail my unwavering confidence in Your abiding presence.

DAY 33

Empowered!

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you ...

Acts 1:8

Leadership Affirmation

My LQ (Leadership Quotient) is fueled by my reliance on God's promises to empower me for service by His Spirit and His promise never to leave me.

When Jesus spoke with His disciples on that final night before His crucifixion, He introduced them to the most amazing truth that both the church and each individual believer in Christ will ever experience. Surely their minds could not imagine the meaning, much less the magnitude, of His promises.

You will do greater works than I do (John 14:12). Whatever you ask in My Name, I will do (John 14:13–14). I will not leave you as orphans (John 14:18). I will come to you (John 14:18). The Father will give you another Counselor [a Paraclete like me who will build on what I have already done both in you and in the world]^{xxiv} (John 14:16). He will be with you, indeed will be in you, forever (John 14:15).

Forty days later, with Jesus' gathered followers on the mountain in Galilee, He expanded their understanding a bit more when He closed His Commission with this verbal command:

Remember, I am with you always (Matthew 28:20). Shortly thereafter, as Jesus was about to Ascend from their sight on the Mount of Olives, He delivered this final promise: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

They were experiencing in real time what we now clearly see.^{xxv} We don't rely on our personal giftedness, position, or personality, or any other human method to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission. Jesus' method for carrying out His mandate is simple: "I will give you my power. And I will give you my presence." We have the promise of His power. We have the promise of His presence. Jesus is with us even to the end of the age!

This promise is such a comforting challenge. It's comforting to know that Jesus is with me wherever I go. I don't have to worry about failure. I don't have to worry about messing up. I don't have to worry about rejection or persecution. Jesus is with me and, as Romans 8 states, nothing can separate us from His love.

Prayer for Protection

O Holy Spirit, I refuse to rely on my natural abilities to influence others for Christ.

DAY 34

An Allegiance to Pledge

Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

John 6:68–69

Leadership Affirmation

My amazing Savior lives! He is worthy of my life, my love, my loyalty, and my leadership so that others may know and follow Him.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He had “concentric circles” of followers.^{xxvi} He ministered to the *Community* (the villages and cities). He spoke to, and fed, the *Crowds*. His *Congregation* numbers fluctuated, but at least five hundred gathered for one of His post-resurrection appearances. The *Committed* included men and women who supported His ministry, with one hundred twenty gathering in an upper room in the days leading up to Pentecost. His *Core* was comprised of twelve, of whom Jesus said one was a “devil” (John 6:71).

With this context in mind, one of the saddest phrases in the Gospels appears in John 6:66. Jesus’ popularity rose quickly after He fed five thousand men. People were swept along by His miracles. They longed for more.

And then the teaching got tough! Jesus proclaimed, “*I am the Bread of Life*,” the first of seven “*I AM*” statements recorded in John’s Gospel.^{xxvii} First, the Jews began grumbling about His message (John 6:41). Then some of His disciples began to grumble (John 6:60–61). John then wrote these sad words: *From that moment, many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him* (John 6:66).

Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, *You don’t want to go away too, do you?* (John 6:67). Simon Peter immediately responded, *Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life* (John 6:68).

The Christian life calls for a commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It calls for one’s life, love, and loyalty. The Great Commission is the unfurled banner leading us forward into spiritual battle for the souls of men and women. The call of God is on us. The resurrected Christ is with us. The Holy Spirit is in us. He has given us a mandate to go. He is worthy of our allegiance, indeed our all. What are we waiting for?

Prayer for Protection

Lord Jesus, I cannot, I must not sit on the sidelines of Your global mission of introducing men and women of every language, every tribe, and every nation to the salvation You freely offer to all who will believe.

DAY 35

A Legacy to Leave

Those who have insight will shine like the bright expanse of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:3

Leadership Affirmation

Father, with the aged Apostle John, I proclaim, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

Seventeen years ago, Alisha and I were engaged to be married. In preparation for our new life, we built a house. I drew the blueprints for it. I was the general contractor on it. I worked on the framing crew that I brought in. Eventually, after we got it dried in, I did all the plumbing, electrical, sheetrock, and everything else. I invested my time and gifts in building a house.

When we got married, Alisha moved in. She made it a home. She picked out furniture and decorated it. The most important thing she brought to it was love and joy. We didn't think a lot about it then, but we were building something that was bigger than us.

A couple of years later, we assembled the first crib in the back bedroom and decorated a nursery. We brought a brand-new baby home and put him in that nursery. Not long after that, we did the same thing in the other bedroom. As the boys grew, we played with them on their little mat in the living room. We watched them learn to walk on those floors. We sat around the dining room table and talked and laughed.

The hardest thing I've ever had to do was to sell that house when God called us into the ministry. The blueprints for it are framed and hanging in our bedroom. They're a constant reminder to me that we were building something then, and we are building something now that's more than a house. We're building a legacy. We're building something that will outlive us.

God called us to go, so we went. That's the legacy I want to leave behind. After I'm gone, I want boys to be able to say, “My dad loved Jesus so much that he dedicated his entire life to becoming what Jesus wanted him to be.” What are you building? What are you leaving behind? What will your legacy be?

Prayer for Protection

Sovereign Lord, please deliver me from entering Your presence with none to testify they heard about Jesus and His Atoning Death, Burial, and Resurrection from my lips during their time on earth.

VOCATIO! Days 36 through 40

Somewhere along the way, Christian ministry started showing up on a list. Career Day rolled around, and there it was between “Civil Engineer” and “Comedian.” “Clergy” became part of a pie chart. Yes, there is a “call” to vocational ministry. Many reading this devotional guide fall into that category.

Somehow, however, modern Christians got the idea that real ministry only happens on the platform. They may keep toddlers from staging a crayon-led coup in the nursery. But *real* ministry? That’s for the pros.

Truth is, some of the most powerful ministry moments happen behind the scenes, in quiet spaces, without anyone clapping. If you think God only uses “up front” people, I have excellent news for you: you’re wrong.

Ministry starts where you are. With the people in front of you. In the conversations no one else hears. God doesn’t just call the person with the microphone. He calls the one who’s willing to help carry the message. Some of the best ministry doesn’t happen with a mic. It happens:

- In hospital rooms, sitting silently with a grieving friend.
- In your kitchen, making extra dinner for the single mom next door.
- In church basements, vacuuming Goldfish crackers out of the carpet.
- In small groups, asking better questions than the leader ever thought to prepare for.

Ministry doesn’t require a stage. It requires obedience. And often, the people doing the most meaningful ministry are the ones you’ll never see under lights. You don’t need to preach a sermon to be in ministry. You don’t need a theology degree, a spotlight, or a strong opinion about the end times. You need a willing heart. You need to show up, listen, speak truth when given the chance, and believe God is at work in the small stuff.

Exodus 4:27–31 is a passage that doesn’t get a lot of airtime at conferences but quietly shows us how God builds His ministry teams. Moses just had a life-upending encounter with God at the burning bush. He’s still recovering from emotional whiplash. And right when he’s probably thinking, “I have to do this alone?” God taps Aaron and says, “Go find your brother. He’s going to need help.”

Aaron’s not the star. He’s the support. He doesn’t get the burning bush, the staff, or the glory. But he gets sent. And what does he do? He shows up. He meets Moses. He *listens* as Moses tells him everything. Then he stands with his brother. Which also is ministry, by the way: showing up, listening, standing with, speaking truth, trusting God to do what only He can.

DAY 36

From the Bush to the Blueprint

God called out to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses!”

Exodus 3:4

Leadership Affirmation

I have a clear understanding that the Lord called me to a life of leadership within a Christian setting.

Blueprints are like snowflakes and fingerprints. Each is unique; yet all have certain similarities. Moses’ call in the Midian wilderness was definitely unique! One moment, Moses is herding sheep and minding his business in the wilderness, and the next, a bush is on fire without burning up, with the voice of God speaking from the bush. God disrupted Moses’ routine lifestyle with an amazing mandate: I have a mission for you!

Tucked into Moses’ call are questions that still echo: How does God call people today? What does it feel like? And *who* does He call? Beneath the drama and the divine fireworks of Moses’ call, we find a deeply practical picture of what it means to be called by God.

The Call is Personal. *God called to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!”* (Exodus 3:4). God knows your name. This wasn’t a generic, “Hey you!” type of thing. God wasn’t tossing divine darts into the desert, hoping to hit a warm body. He knew exactly who He wanted, and He called him personally.

The Call is Providential. *The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire...* (Exodus 3:2). This call wasn’t Moses’ idea. God orchestrated it. He set the bush ablaze, knowing with certainty that Moses would see it.

The Call is Purposeful. *Come, I will send you to Pharaoh...* (Exodus 3:10). God didn’t call Moses for a feel-good moment or to give him a cool testimony. He had a mission. A hard one. The call of God is always about joining God in what He’s already doing. God never calls you to *nothing*. He calls you to *something*.

The Call Contains a Promise. *I will be with you.* (Exodus 3:12). When Moses begins to freak out with excuse after excuse, God answers with the non-comforting yet most-comforting statement ever: *“I will be with you.”* God doesn’t throw you into the deep end and hope you can swim. He walks with you, step by step.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, if I cannot recall the precise day, time, or location You placed Your call on my life, please confirm with an inner certainty that You have called me to lead and I can do nothing else but say, “Here Am I!”

DAY 37

Faith Plus Doubt Equals ... Calling?

But Moses asked God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh ... ?”

Exodus 3:11

Leadership Affirmation

Lord, I confess that I am a “whole bunch of not much.” But You IN me—now that changes everything!

Few people have a burning bush to put the biblical stamp of authority on their calling from God. Moses’ call certainly contained drama, but it is far more practical and repeatable than we might expect.

God Does Something New: “*And the angel of the Lord appeared to him...*” (Exodus 3:2). A call to ministry always starts with God. Not with your aspirations. God moves first. The Lord appeared to him and drew him in.

We Respond with Curiosity: “*Moses said, ‘I will turn aside to see this great sight...’*” (Exodus 3:3). Moses could have walked on by, but he didn’t. A huge part of calling is not just noticing something unusual, but *responding* to it. Moses didn’t know he was being called, but something caught his attention, and he took a closer look.

God's Presence Brings Clarity: “*When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him...*” (Exodus 3:4). It wasn’t until Moses turned aside that God spoke. The burning bush was an invitation. The instruction followed the curiosity. Only when we draw near to God and linger in His presence do we hear His voice.

The First Reaction is Often Hesitation: “*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?*” (Exodus 3:11). Moses offered a series of very human objections. I’m not qualified. They won’t listen. I’m bad with words. And if we’re honest, we do the same. When God starts getting specific, we start getting squirmy.

Surrender Follows Struggle: “*So Moses...went back to the land of Egypt.*” (Exodus 4:20). Despite all Moses’ objections and hesitations, the reluctant shepherd became the deliverer of a nation. It didn’t happen in a moment. It happened after wrestling. Moses didn’t volunteer. He surrendered. And that’s how most true callings work. They’re not dreams we chase. They’re assignments we yield to, doubts swallowed up by faith!

Prayer for Protection

Spirit of God, deliver me from being defined by my doubts, controlled by my fears, or hampered by my past in my service for the Lord God of Heaven and Earth!

DAY 38

Excuse Your Excuses!

Moses answered, “What if they won’t believe me and will not obey me ...?”

Exodus 4:1

Leadership Affirmation

*I trust the Lord to use me, to give me the words to say and the wisdom to lead those
He brings across my path on this journey we call life.*

When God calls, He isn’t looking for perfect résumés. He is the equipper. So, He patiently hears our *I can’t* or *they won’t* or *what if* excuses. Moses provides an insight into some common excuses we offer when God disrupts our world with a call to join Him in His mission of delivering His people from bondage.

Objection #1: “Who am I?” (Exodus 3:11). Moses sees an amazing sight and hears an eyebrow-raising summons. His first response basically says, *“I think You meant to call someone taller, smarter, and more Egyptian.”* We all do this. God looks at us and sees potential. We look in the mirror and see our limitations.

Objection #2: “They Won’t Believe Me” (Exodus 4:1). Moses predicts failure before he even tries. In today’s terms, this is the fear of being taken seriously, of people willing to follow your leadership. Ministry isn’t about being impressive. It’s about being faithful. God blesses our availability. He equips us for service.

Objection #3: “I’m Not Good at Speaking” (Exodus 4:10). Ah, yes, the public speaking panic attack. Moses wasn’t thrilled about speaking to large crowds of his own people, much less delivering an ultimatum to a powerful monarch. He basically tells God, *“I’m not TED Talk material.”*

Objection #4: “Can You Send Someone Else?” (Exodus 4:13). When God disrupts our routine, we want to pass the buck to another. You can almost hear God sigh with frustration over Moses’ continued hesitation, but He gives Moses help in the form of his brother Aaron. God, in His mercy, is not dissuaded by our reluctance.

Objection #5: “I Have a Past.” Moses had a literal skeleton buried in the sand. And maybe you have your own skeletons. We think, surely God would never use someone who’s messed up *that* badly. But redemption is kind of God’s thing. His response is grace. He can use even the most flawed sinner to point others to Christ.

Prayer for Protection

Lord, I reject satan’s shrill lies that You cannot use me to bring deliverance to those enslaved by sin.

DAY 39

Pick Up Your Staff!

The Lord asked him, “What is that in your hand?”

Exodus 4:2

Leadership Affirmation

I surrender to the Lord whatever He has placed in my hand, trusting He will use my both my past training and my present feelings of inadequacy to do mighty works of grace in others' lives.

We often fear a call to ministry because we misunderstand how God uses our past to shape our future. God is not a “celestial Scrooge,” forcing us to choose between doing the things that bring us fulfillment or surrendering to His call and being miserable.^{xxviii} God reframes who you currently are to fashion you into who He created you to be. Your past experiences, training, and vocation become tools for a fulfilling ministry.

When the Lord told Moses to pick up his staff, he redefined how Moses viewed himself (a simple shepherd on the back side of the desert) into what God was calling him to be (a shepherd to the people of God). Before the bush, he was surviving. After the bush, he was burdened. He couldn’t unhear God’s call. From that day forward, his shepherd’s staff became the rod of God.

Your disruption may not be a burning bush, but something unexpected captures your attention. God’s call becomes personal. You’re driving home and can’t stop thinking about the kids in your church who don’t know Jesus. You’re sitting through a meeting and think, “I was made for more than this.”

Everything around you starts echoing the same message. Opportunities open up. Scripture hits you differently in your daily reading. You start hearing things in sermons you’ve never noticed before. Not because the preacher changed, but because *you* did.

You develop a passion for discipling teenagers, planting churches, or shepherding hurting people. You lie awake at night thinking about how to reach your neighborhood, not just how to pay your bills. You’ve gone from “*Somebody should do something*” to “*I think that somebody may be me.*” God doesn’t keep bringing it up to annoy you. He brings it up because He’s patiently awaiting your yes. Isn’t it time to pick up your staff?

Prayer for Protection

Father, thank you for transforming my vocational training into a vocation for You. I refuse to let any sense of inadequacy hinder me from fulfilling my calling in Christ.

DAY 40

VOCATIO!

I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

Exodus 3:10

Leadership Affirmation

God has set me in my vocational setting that I may lead people out of darkness into the marvelous light of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

You don't need to preach sermons to be in ministry. You don't need a theology degree, a spotlight, or a strong opinion about the end times. You need a willing heart. You need to show up, listen, speak truth when given the chance, and believe God is at work in the small stuff. Ministry starts where you are with the people in front of you. In the conversations no one else hears.

A Career Is Something You Choose. A Calling Chooses You. Careers come with job descriptions. Callings come with assignments. And sometimes those assignments start with, “Go confront Pharaoh.”

A Career Is About Advancement. A Calling Is About Obedience. In a career, you climb the ladder. But in ministry, often it's just God handing you a mop and saying, “Start here.”

A Career Ends When You Retire. A Calling Ends When You Stop Breathing. You don't age out of ministry. Callings aren't tied to a paycheck or a time clock. They're tied to a relationship with Jesus.

A Career Asks, “What's In It for Me?” A Calling Asks, “What's God Asking of Me?” Moses didn't sign up for the benefits. He said yes, although reluctantly at first, and showed up when God told him where he was needed.

A Career Is Something You Manage. A Calling Is Something You Steward. You can manage a career, plan it, polish it, and tweak it. But a calling? It's not yours to manipulate. It's yours to steward. It's yours to fulfill.

Burn the résumé. Keep the staff. When God calls, remember: you didn't choose this. God chose you. He does the equipping. He's good. He's faithful. For you, it starts with one quiet, trembling, life-altering “Yes.”

Prayer for Protection

Lord, You have placed me exactly where I am, at this precise moment in history, with a personal assignment — to reach those in my circle of influence that no one is better equipped to reach. Thank You Jesus

END NOTES

ⁱ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2016). On pages 53–63, Geiger and Peck explore God’s design for leadership as seen in the creation narrative, how the fall affects God’s design for leadership, and how Jesus redeems God’s original design.

ⁱⁱ By our count in George Wigram’s *Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament*, Fifth Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970; rpt from Samuel Bagster and Sons, London, 1860). the masculine noun *ezer* occurs twenty-one times, the related feminine noun *ezrah* occurs twenty-five times, and various forms of the verb *azar* occur eighty-two times in the Old Testament. The masculine noun is associated with strength, help, assistance, intervention, often standing alone, but other times in a compound noun (such as Samuel’s Ebenezer monument, 1 Samuel 7:12) or in a name (such as Moses’ son Eliezer, Exodus 18:4). The word *ezer* most often refers to the Person and the work of God. It contains no hint of superior or inferior standing.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jack Taylor, *One Home Under God*, (Nashville: The Baptist Sunday School Board, 1974). Taylor’s small but influential book used this phrase as a title to encourage husbands and wives to “receive” one another and their children as God’s gifts to shine a light on their imperfections so that they would see themselves for who they are and be more fully conformed to the character of Christ.

^{iv} John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 1.

^v Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 62. The definition of leadership I offer is inspired, in part, by Geiger and Peck’s focus on the purpose of leadership. They write, “The primary purpose of our leadership mandate is to make known the glory of God by leading others to flourish in God’s design.”

^{vi} This is a quote I’ve heard phrased in numerous ways. I am unable to locate the origins of the quote. John Maxwell used it in his work *Be A People Person: Effective Leadership Through Effective Relationships*. Brad Lomenick used it in *H3 Leadership*. Jack Frost used a version of it in *Experiencing Fathers Embrace*.

^{vii} Jeff Iorg, *The Character of Leadership: Nine Qualities that Define Great Leaders*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 24.

^{viii} Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 80.

^{ix} D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 462.

^x Oswald Chambers, “Are You Ready To Be Poured Out As An Offering,” in *My Utmost for His Highest: An Updated Edition in Today’s Language*, edited by James Reimann (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992 [Original edition © 1935 by Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc.]), s.v. “February 5.”

^{xi} C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), 36.

^{xii} Iorg, *The Character of Leadership*, 95.

^{xiii} By personal count from *The Greek New Testament*, Second Edition, Published Simultaneously in New York by the American Bible Society; and in London, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, and Stuttgart by their respective

Bible Societies, 1968; with corroboration from *The Beginner's Guide to the Bible* by Jeffrey Kranz, posted online at <https://overviewbible.com/shortest-books/>, accessed July 30, 2025.

xiv John Macarthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 105.

xv D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 416.

xvi John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 1-11* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006), 466.

xvii Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 20024), 341.

xviii Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 404.

xix John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 5. Maxwell discusses this concept by writing, “A person may be ‘in control’ because he has been appointed to a position. In that position, he may have authority. But real leadership is more than having authority.”

xx *Katexousiago*, used only here in Mark 10:42 and in the Matthew parallel, Matthew 20:25, is pressing the weight of authority down on others so as to coerce them to bend to your wishes. The contributors to BAGD use the word “tyrannize” as an appropriate translation of this word (William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, a translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, Second Edition revised and augments by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Baur's Fifth Edition, 1958 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. *κατεξουσιάζω*. *Katakyrieo* is used here and in the Matthean parallel and in two other passages, including 1 Peter 5:3. It carries the meaning “to rule over someone” or “gain dominion over, subdue” (*Ibid.*, s.v. *κατακυριεύω*). It is especially noteworthy that the aged Peter, in writing to his fellow elders used this word from the lips of Jesus at this specific teaching moment with the disciples.

xxi G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 139.

xxii Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 369.

xxiii John Macarthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24-28* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1989), 329.

xxiv Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Volume III in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, edited by Alvah Hovey (Valley Forge, Judson Press, 1885), 288. On this verse, Hovey wrote, “Christ speaks of the Spirit whom the Father was about to give them, at his request, as *another* (ἄλλον) Paraclete, but not as a *different sort of* (ἕτερον) Paraclete. This implies that Jesus had been a Paraclete to His disciples, and that the Spirit would do for them substantially the same thing which he had been doing.,,. The word Paraclete, as used by John in his First Epistle evidently signifies *Advocate*—i.e., one who acts, pleads, intercedes, with the Father for His own, who have sinned. And there appears to be no reason the term should be supposed to have a different meaning here. For, certainly, the Holy Spirit may be said to act or plead for Christ with his people, and with mankind in general.”

xxv A. T. Robertson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Volume V in *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932). Robertson, one of the leading Greek grammarians of the twentieth century, rightly noted, “One need only refer to Peter’s sermon at pentecost [sic] after the coming of the Holy Spirit, to Peter’s Epistles, to Paul’s Epistles, to Hebrews, to John’s Epistles, to see how under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit the disciples grew into the fulness of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 6:4),” 268–269.

xxvi Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995). In the seventh chapter, Warren introduced what he called five levels of commitment, a concept that continues to influence church leaders and scholars alike. Moving in concentric circles, from the largest to the center, these five levels of commitment are Community, Crowd, Congregation, Committed, and Core.

xxvii The seven “I AMs” of Jesus in John’s Gospel are “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 48); “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5); “I am the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7, 9); “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14); “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25); “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6); and “I am the true vine” (John 15:1, 5). The phrase (*ego eimi* [έγώ εἰμι]) is an intensified use of the phrase “I Am” in the original language of the New Testament.

xxviii Paul E. Little, *Affirming the Will of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 10–11.