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## Pursuing Biblical Leadership

Kyle Donker  
*Grand Valley State University*

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Pursuing Biblical Leadership

Kyle Donker

Grand Valley State University

HNR 499 – Winter 2014

## Preface

This essay is written within the context Christian thoughts and beliefs, so certain topics are assumed that one outside of the Christian community may disagree with. If you do not adhere to the Christian belief, please feel free to continue reading, just don't be offended if something is assumed that you find subjective.

Specifically, this essay is written for Christian leaders, which I define as anyone in a leadership role within the body of Christ. This role may be a Sunday school teach, a small group leader, a pastor, a missionary, or anyone in between. It is my hope to equip and challenge these leaders into a more Christ-centered relationship with God which would naturally flow into the leader's ministry.

This essay is also for those aspiring to be leaders. I believe what is written here is foundational for any leader of the Church. What is addressed in this paper is a leader's character. I believe that character is the most fundamental attribute of a leader. From one's character, vision (and vision casting) can be developed along with skills and competencies to fulfill that vision.

Currently, this is simply an essay, but one day when I am more equipped and learned, I hope to develop this essay into a book on Biblical leadership. Right now, it is in its beginning stages, focussing on some of the most essential qualifications of a leader. I believe that God can use this for great things as you grow and your character develops.

I hope God blesses you through the reading of this paper. And I pray He challenges and calls you into greater intimacy with Him, developing you into a more mature and Christ-centered leader.

## Introduction

When I first chose to write on Biblical leadership I had an agenda and a dream. Both planning and dreaming are good and God glorifying, but only if God is the one motivating it. When I planned to write this, God's glory was not my primary motivator. My glory was. I wanted to be "creative," "inventive," and "wise." I wanted to be a source of new knowledge, but somewhere along the way I got trapped into the lie that I possessed something special that God has yet to reveal. As if God wanted to wait 2000 years after revealing Himself and His vision and guidance so that some twenty-one year old kid could walk onto the stage of life and reveal God's "secret plan" to leadership. I was prideful and not seeking the God first.<sup>1</sup> When pride redirects a leader's gaze from the glory of God to the glory of self, heresy can easily set in with divisions and strife often following. Paul calls these people "false prophets" in 1 Timothy 1. Jesus said that these people will walk up to him in the last days proclaiming all they have done and He will say to them "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt 7:27).

How I fear and pray never to hear those words from my Savior. And how I pray no leader, or perceived leader, of God's flock ever befalls upon this same judgement. For His name is too wonderful for us to block it with ourselves. His glory is too magnificent for us to claim we are anything but products of His imagination and power. As John the baptist says, "He must increase, but I must decrease".<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason why I write on leadership: to glorify God and build up His church by developing future leaders who also attribute all glory to God. This occurs by God's power, from His wisdom, and for God's glory. I pray He will bless you in this.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>2</sup> John 3:30 ESV

## Part 1: Leaders Need Jesus

There's a tendency of mine that scares me to the core. Sadly, this rarely brings tremors to my heart because I seldom slow down to take note. In fact, my inability to notice reflects the condition of my heart. Somehow, somehow, I become apathetic toward the God I love, the source of *all* things. It doesn't come in an instant. In fact, I rarely notice it until I am already far off track. But at some point I find myself lacking desire to get in the word of God, or worse, I assume I know it all, thus making the gospel, the reason for my hope, boring. I've heard that no one ever falls from belief, they drift from it. Only recently have I begun to take notice of my heart for these signs of drifting.

I'm sure you've felt it before. You've noticed a lack of desire or need for God in your heart. I think that, in some way, we fall into a subconscious misconception that as agents of grace we no longer need to be recipients of it. Obviously we don't proclaim "I don't need God," nor do we theologially think it. However, through our thoughts, our words, our deeds, and potentially our checkbooks, we can see a sense of independence take root and grow.

What I've learned is that I constantly take my salvation for granted. Let that sink...I know I need to. I take my salvation, and all its implications, for granted. This glorious gift that God died for to give me somehow becomes an theological conviction that affects how I talk to other Christians but, in some absurd, way carries no implication into my life and how I live it! That scares me.

I see men in the Bible yearn for God as if they'd die without Him, yet I often live my days with a sort of apathy that is more reminiscent of Pharaoh in Egypt than of David as he dances with joy to God, as his wife stands ashamed, while returning the Ark of the Covenant to

Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> I believe we sometimes think the gospel is for non-Christians, for “the lost,” and forget that it applies so valuably and satisfyingly to our lives. The gospel, the good news of Jesus, is multifaceted. It exposes our need for help, our need for a savior. It provides a solution to our brokenness through Jesus. It calls us to either accept or deny this gift from God. And it promises to those who believe, positional righteousness with God and a deep renewing of our souls. Daily it remakes us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. The gospel we adhere to is alive, it is freeing, and it is real! To fully believe in this and “buy in” to God’s plan for your life, is where eternal life and purpose are found.

### **Finding our Source**

Leaders must find their power, purpose and hope in Christ. We must understand that without Jesus our power will fail, our purpose will fade, and our hope will founder. So what does it look like to find our power, purpose, and hope in Christ? We’ll look at scriptural examples to portray this. But first I must emphasize that none of these things will occur unless we “love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind”.<sup>4</sup>

### *Loving the Lord*

There is one story I read that continues to haunt me to this day. It haunts me because what is described I often lack, but it’s something I want. I once read it in Donald Miller’s book *Blue Like Jazz*, maybe you’ve heard of it. This story is how Miller chose to begin a chapter focused on Jesus. It goes like this:

*A guy I know named Alan went around the country asking ministry leaders questions. He went to successful churches and asked the pastors what they were doing, why what they were doing was working. It sounded very boring except for one visit he*

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 6

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 22:37 ESV

*made to a man named Bill Bright, the president of a big ministry. Alan said he was a big man, full of life, who listened without shifting his eyes. Alan asked a few questions. I don't know what they were, but as a final question he asked Dr. Bright what Jesus meant to him. Alan said Dr. Bright could not answer the question. He said Dr. Bright just started to cry. He sat there in his big chair behind his big desk and wept.*

*When Alan told the story I wonder what it was like to love Jesus that way. I wondered, quite honestly, if that Bill Bright guy was just nuts or if he really knew Jesus in a personal way, so well that he would cry at the very mention of His name. I knew then that I would like to know Jesus like that, with my heart, not just my head. I felt like that would be the key to something.*

- Miller 233

Now that's something. That's something I want. I remember first reading that story and just being so moved to love God that way. Since then a new prayer has come into my consistent prayer life. It's quite simple, but it's honest, and I truly do desire it. It goes like this, *God, I want to love you more. Help me to love you more. And may I never be satisfied.* I'll be the first to admit that I don't always desire that, nor do I always pray that prayer. But I want to. I've found that these "I want to..." prayers are some of my favorite and rise from deep within my soul. They come as a result of my inadequacies and beg God to be greater. "I want to love you more God." "I want to desire you more." "I want to love my flock as you love me." "I want to point others to you always." "I want to trust you God." And my favorite in times when I doubt God, "I want to want to seek You." And that's not a typo.

Throughout the Bible we see men who yearn for God in ways rarely portrayed in our leaders today. In David's psalms we read some of the most longing words as he says "as a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God".<sup>5</sup> In psalm 63 he says, "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 42:1-2 ESV

thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water...

Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You".<sup>6</sup>

In these texts we hear the words *pants*, *thirsts*, and *yearns* attributed to mans desire for God. I don't know about you, but I don't pant for God. If I run 8 miles on nothing but a cup of coffee, heck yeah I'll be panting for some water and yearning for an ambulance, but rarely does my soul *pant* for God like my body would pant for that water. And when it does, it's usually after reading something like this paper, and it lasts for maybe a week.

For a more vivid picture, Matt Chandler likens this heart condition to a *lust* for God (Chandler). What a trip! Stumble over that for a few moments. Think about lust and it's implications. Lust is insatiable! It's a desire for something that never is satisfied. You continue to want more and more. Liken it to an addiction. Porn addicts lust for porn. Drug addicts lust for drugs. God addicts lust for...God. Crazy concept isn't it? For an example outside of the Bible, consider Brother Lawrence who wrote of God, "I am presently recalled by inward motions, so charming and delicious that I am ashamed to mention them" (Lawrence 27). And it just blows my mind when he says that he finds himself "often attached with greater sweetness and delight than that of an infant at the mothers breast: so that if I dare use the expression, I should choose to call this state the bosom of God" (Lawrence 27). To put these quotes together (which is logical since they're from the same paragraph), this man has delicious thoughts of the bosom of God. This thought makes me squirm because I have no idea what to do with such words describing a mans relationship with God. But this reminds me of Bill Bright's passion for Jesus. It reminds

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 63:1&3 NASB



me of David's love for God. And it reminds of Paul's testimony when he says "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord".<sup>7</sup>

There's a love for God present in these men that I hope becomes an all-present character trait in all leaders of the body of Christ. It's something I pray for myself and, when I remember, for the church as a whole. A love for the Lord must be the root of our character and all that we do as leaders. If we do not love God, nothing else will matter. We won't be able to love, lead, and learn from others. God is our center with Jesus as our hope. All else flows from here. Pastor Dave Kraft—church leader, and author of *Leaders Who Last*, who has been in ministry forty years—calls this the leaders power, and he says it begins on our knees. In his book he explains an aspect of his relationship with the source of his power:

*So, the power-tapping idea begins for me on my knees, as I surrender my day to the Lord. It then progresses as I spend time with the Lord in the Word and prayer. With his help, I carry that spirit and attitude throughout the day. I confess when I step out on my own, and rejoice when he gently nudges and reminds me that he wants to be my power supply. He guides me back to the source: himself!*

- Kraft 36

We must never forget that Jesus is our source. Dave Kraft so beautifully reminds us that allowing Jesus to be our power includes confession, repentance, and rejoicing. We are not perfect, but God will continue to sanctify us and remind us that He is our source and our first love. I often say that the best anything always flows out of our relationship with God. But to relate with God, we must seek to know Him as He knows us.<sup>8</sup> Seeking God is a process, an ongoing on conscious effort. John Piper says that "it is the conscious fixing or focusing of our mind's attention and our heart's affection on God...[while] flee[ing] every spiritually dulling

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 3:8 ESV

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 139:16

activity” (Piper).<sup>9</sup> Seeking God is an ongoing ethic that will last the rest of our lives, and it is in seeking God that we come to love Him more and more. I pray we learn to love Him as He loves us, so that we can enjoy Him as He enjoys us.<sup>10</sup>

### *Finding Our Power*

Though I’ve already referred to this while quoting Dave Kraft, I firmly believe that a leader’s power flows out of his relationship with Christ. Man can produce nothing lasting without Jesus as the fuel and goal. All buildings crumble, cars rust, and people die. If we as leaders forgo Christ as our power, our works will ultimately fail, and worse, we may be giving those we lead everything but what they truly need: Jesus.

We will never stop needing Jesus. We always will need His sanctifying power in our lives. Dave Kraft is 70 years old and he boldly admits that he *still* needs Christ’s sanctifying power (Kraft 36). What I’ve learned is that we all are in a constant process of sanctification. As God’s children, He will continually discipline us so that we may mature and grow into the greater freedom and joy of Christ Jesus. He does this because He loves us.<sup>11</sup> As our heavenly Father, He knows us intimately and loves us immensely. He knows how to give us good things, even if that means temporal punishment and pain for the sake of lasting good.<sup>12</sup> For I am convinced that “our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I highly recommend reading this blog post by John Piper to give you a framework to work with as you seek God. See works cited page for URL.

<sup>10</sup> Zephaniah 3:17

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 12:5-6

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 7:11

<sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17 HCSB

What we need is an ongoing ethic of returning to the root of our faith. As leaders it's easy to get distracted, forgetting that it is God who is working through our faithfulness. Dave Kraft knows that for all leaders "it is easy for the work and the ministry to be the center instead of Jesus himself" (Kraft 29). And God knows this too. He knows how easily we forget how we were saved. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says, "therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving".<sup>14</sup> This command explains that we are to not only receive Jesus as our means of salvation but also as the fuel to our daily walk of life. We are to be "rooted," or as Strong's Concordance explains the word, "firmly planted" or "established" in Christ Jesus (Strong G4492).<sup>15</sup>

As most of us know, plants require their roots to grow. They gain most of their essential nutrients through their roots. Without being rooted, flowers founder and trees topple. In the same way, if we are not rooted in Christ, we too will fall as leaders, unable to serve as God calls us to. But worse, if we are not rooted in Christ, He may chop us off and burn us with the chaff.<sup>16</sup> For Jesus is the vine and we are His branches, and He says that "whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing".<sup>17</sup> Nothing. We can do nothing without Him. We need Him to be our power, our source of nutrients, our guiding force.

But if this is us, if we are rooted and built up in Him, He promises to be with us. He promises to be our power. This is a guarantee, not a possibility. God will grant us power through

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<sup>14</sup> Colossians 2:6-7 ESV

<sup>15</sup> G4492 refers to the "word number" within Strong's concordance. G = Greek and 4492 = word number

<sup>16</sup> John 15:6

<sup>17</sup> John 15:5 ESV

the Holy Spirit so that we can be His witnesses to the world.<sup>18</sup> This is Christ's desire for us. He longs for us to experience Him and to see His glory, so that we can proclaim this glory of His to the world. He longs for it! Jesus prayed this exact thing to His Father pleading, "may they be made completely one, so the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire those You have given Me to be with Me where I am. Then they will see My glory".<sup>19</sup> I long for this too, hoping that we all can be empowered by our heavenly Father, experiencing and proclaiming His glory to the world. How exciting is this power! How exciting is this gift from God! What an opportunity and gift we have received through Christ! May we all be rooted and built up in Him, seeking His glory, as we lead the flock He's so graciously blessed us with.

### *Pursuing Our Purpose*

Recently I was reading a book written by Dan Hayes in the mid 1990s that focused on the spiritual condition of America's college campuses. One thing that really stuck out to me is that he said most college students don't have a purpose in their lives; they just have goals (Hayes 3). He explained that most students want to "get a job, buy a house, and have a big family," with their purpose after this being "a bigger job, a bigger house, a bigger family, and perhaps a bigger mate. Beyond that, they have no purpose" (3). As the author described the average spiritual condition of universities back then, I couldn't help but notice the similar state of college campuses today.<sup>20</sup> Most students do not have a purpose outside of material success and the generic purpose of "being a good person." Though these things can be good, they're not great.

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>19</sup> John 17:23-24 HCSB

<sup>20</sup> I've personally experienced this, as I'm just ending my college career at this time.

They are not world changing, let alone life changing. I find very few college students pursuing a vision and a purpose far greater than themselves. And these students are supposed to be our future.<sup>21</sup> Our nation is relying upon these goal-oriented students to bring us into a brighter tomorrow. But what scares me most is our church is relying on them too.

I think of those bright lights in church history. I think of Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, C.T. Studd, Martin Luther King Jr., and Samuel Mills. These men all had a vision and purpose that motivated them, and their impact didn't just change the church but the world. I pray for leaders with vision to rise up out of the church. I don't want Christianity to be boring like we've so successfully made it (Hayes 6). It was never intended to be boring. It was meant to be exciting, exhilarating, inspiring!

Think of epic movies like 300, Gladiator, or Braveheart. These movies get our blood pumping and make us wish our lives were like that, with risk and danger and power and purpose. If you don't know what I mean, watch them.<sup>22</sup> I've found that as a man I long for adventure and purpose and sometimes danger. This doesn't mean that I seek out danger like an adrenaline junky, but that does mean that I won't run away if my purpose leads me into it.

Just look at Jesus and His disciples. Listen to what He says to the twelve right before sending them out. And please, read this like you're listening to a general commanding his army because, in truth, Jesus is our General and King:<sup>23</sup>

*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in*

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<sup>21</sup> This is speaking from experience, as I've been told this many times.

<sup>22</sup> And don't say that they go against your faith so you can't. Use discretion always, but placing ourselves in a Christian bubble is the most effective way of losing our passion for the mission we've been commissioned to as followers of Jesus Christ.

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 19:11-16

*their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.<sup>24</sup>*

- Matthew 10:16-22

Wow! Put that in a movie and see what happens! We have men willingly walking into danger for the sake of their purpose of proclaiming that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”.<sup>25</sup> These twelve disciples had a purpose to fight for and that was the purpose Jesus called them into. And we see that the pursuit of this purpose is like the underdog stories we love. These men are sheep, their enemies are wolves. I don't know if you realize this but wolves *eat* sheep like it's their job! This is not some safe sanitized Christianity. This is real. This is dangerous. But more important than any of that, this purpose is *worth it*.<sup>26</sup>

Now, place yourself into the sandals of the disciples. What Jesus is calling them to do has to bring a tremor to their bones! It's scary! Jesus is telling them that they *will* be persecuted, not might be, *will* be. When your leader says you'll be “dragged before governors,” “hated by all,” and that family ties will turn into deathly rivalries, yet you still go, that *must be* a result of a purpose that stands above you and motivates you.

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 10:16-22

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 10:7 ESV

<sup>26</sup> Understand that though we may be sheep, we are truly not the underdogs. Though in this world's physical battle we may appear to be so, we are truly on the winning side. If we read through Old Testament prophecies and the book of Revelation, we know the end. We know we win. So though we may be perceived as underdogs, we can confidently act knowing that, in the end, we will reign victorious alongside of Lord!

But our God doesn't give us a purpose without hope. While commissioning His disciples, Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit will speak through them. He says that those "who endure to the end will be saved." Though our purpose may be dangerous, our hope is secure in Christ, through whom our "names are written in heaven".<sup>27</sup> And He promises, "I am with you always, to the end of the age".<sup>28</sup> Now this does not mean that we will be safe, nor that our purpose in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ won't lead to pain, suffering, or even death, but it does show that it's fully worth it.

Of the twelve disciples, we know that all but John and Judas Iscariot were martyrs for their faith (Patton). Judas, as we know, hanged himself, and John died a natural death.<sup>29</sup> Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael (Bartholomew), Simon the zealot, and Matthias (who replaced Judas) are all said to have been crucified (Patton). James, Matthew, and the apostle Paul were all beheaded. And Thomas, James (the Lesser), and Judas Thaddeus were all murdered for their faith in another manner (Patton).

Though I don't wish to imply we all will die for our faith, I do wish to emphasize the immense value of the faith we hold onto and the purpose we are called to pursue. It is worth the risk! It's worth it. Remember, "our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory."<sup>30</sup> We will face troubles, but take heart for our Lord has overcome the world!<sup>31</sup> Our purpose is worth it!

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 10:20 ESV

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 28:20 ESV

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 27:5

<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17 HCSB

<sup>31</sup> John 16:33

Now, I wrote most of this without explicitly saying what our purpose is. That's because our God is deeply personal, and the purposes He calls us to will model that relationship.

However, I do know that our purpose will fall underneath the mission Jesus called us all to. We call it the Great Commission, but ultimately, it's our mission statement, our purpose:

*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 ESV

I love this text! I know it's not the oft-quoted Great Commission passage, but the purpose and message is the same. God is with us! Jesus promises to be with us always in Matthew 28, and in Acts 1 He says that the Holy Spirit will "come upon" us, empowering us! I love this passage because it gives us a purpose, the only purpose worth fighting for. And in pursuing this purpose, we are often forced into greater reliance upon God, and in this reliance, in God, we find our hope.

### *Persevering In Hope*

As a sophomore in college, I was subject to such a sense of hopelessness that I hope to never experience again, but I know I will due to the nature of my purpose and calling. I remember it quite vividly, memories that I will never forget. In the process of three weeks, three people in my life committed suicide, two occurring in one day.<sup>32</sup> Though I will not go into detail of the deaths and situations, I can honestly say that it was one of the darkest moments of my life. I remember states of paranoia occurring whenever I saw anyone in distress, assuming they'd run off and end their life the moment they left my sight. I remember sobbing uncontrollably. I

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<sup>32</sup> Through unrelated circumstances



remember confusion, pain, and hurt. And I remember *feeling* an absence of God. In fact, I didn't want to trust Him, nor did I desire to pursue Him, so I didn't.

It wasn't until a deep moment of brokenness where I witnessed people joyfully singing to and proclaiming the mercies of this God I said I loved. I remember bitterness rising up. I remember yelling at God and asking Him why? Why!

But then I also remember a soft voice speaking to me. A quiet, gentle voice that was asking me a question. He asked,

*Kyle, am I worth being praised even now?*

I knew it was God. I knew it. I remember pondering on that question, heavily debating on whether I wanted to praise a God that allowed my friends to take their lives. It was the first time my faith went through such a fire, such pressure. I contemplated my life, my past, and thought of the times when I tried to live life on my own without God's guidance. I remembered how miserably I failed. I knew I couldn't go back to that route. I thought about others briefly, but knew that if I couldn't help myself how could they. So I sat there, with no viable option but the one that seemed to already betray me. I couldn't come up with any other source for my hope, strength, and security. I took in some air to stable myself and said to God, *yes, You are worth being praised*. So He responded:

*Then sing to me.*

So I sang. I couldn't stand. I couldn't form any words. But at that moment, in that pain, I worshipped God for who He was, not for how I felt. And my friends, the most overwhelming peace flowed through my body. I couldn't explain it then and neither can I today. All I know is that I had no reason to feel peace, but I did.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- Philippians 4:6-7 ESV

I love that story of my life. I don't love the situation. I don't love that my friends are no longer with us. I don't love the loss. But I do love God. I love how He provides. And I love how He has used a situation of darkness and made it an opportunity to proclaim His light! He is God. He is good. Always.

So persevering in hope. Persevering in hope. As God's children, there is only one place where we find lasting hope that does not fail. That hope is in Jesus. I don't know how else men like Stephen could have stood up in the face of such persecution, leading to his death by stoning, if it were not for a hope in Christ and His promises.<sup>33</sup> Paul—who was often imprisoned for his faith and perseverance in the message of the gospel—had more reasons to doubt this hope that he claimed to have in Christ Jesus, but he persevered in this hope right up to his martyrdom. As I said in the last section on purpose, we will face tribulation. In fact, Jesus guarantees it, but in the same breath Jesus says to take heart for He has overcome the world!<sup>34</sup>

It is my hope that, as leaders of the church, we want to experience what Christ experienced. I pray that we do not settle for bookstore Christianity where our faith is requires no true faith and promises only happiness. I pray that we desire to know God, to know Jesus. I pray that we long to be so intimately connected with our Lord and Savior that we desire nothing less than to grow closer and closer to Him with each passing day. As leaders, I believe that our greatest hope is in Christ, and that this hope can, and will, motivate us through any trial and

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<sup>33</sup> Read Acts 6-7 for the full Biblical account of Stephen.

<sup>34</sup> John 16:33

tribulation. One day, I hope every leader finds such a hope in Christ that they desire to know God more intimately than anyone or anything else. So much so that they stand alongside Paul proclaiming:

*For [Christ's] sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

- Philippians 3:8b-11 ESV

Christ is our hope.

Christ is our purpose.

Christ is our power.

I pray we all rest in Him.

## **Part 2: Leaders Fear the Lord**

The word “fear” always seems to bring confusion when attributing it to our relationship with God. I’ve seen pastors dance around this word and try to explain it without denoting the feeling that God is scary, mean, or anything other than the loving God we often, and poorly, try to advertise (and yes I mean advertise) to those we reach out to. However, the fear of the Lord is one of the most common attributes associated with God’s blessing throughout the Bible. To attribute the fear of the Lord as a mere respect or reverence of the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and omniscient God is foolish. The word used to describe the fear of the Lord is far more than reverence. He deserves to be feared like we fear losing our job, our loved ones, our control, and our security.

Honestly, the fear of the Lord is for our own safety. To protect Isaiah from going astray,<sup>35</sup> God Himself said to him, “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread”.<sup>36</sup> It is from this line that God continues to say to Isaiah, “Then He shall become a sanctuary”.<sup>37</sup> It is through fearing God that safety is found in His sanctuary, in His holy presence, which quite literally exists within those who are His children.<sup>38</sup>

### **Roots for Idolatry**

Crawford Loritts—long-time Biblical leader, former Associate Director of Campus Crusade for Christ USA, and current pastor of Fellowship Bible Chapel in Roswell, Georgia—

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<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 8:11

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 8:13 NASB

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 8:14 NASB

<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16

recently said that “fear is a form of worship” (Loritts). What you fear is your god. If you fear social scrutiny, you will mold and form yourself to align with the newest social trends. If you fear losing your boyfriend or girlfriend, you find yourself doing things you never thought you’d do for the sake of pleasing that person. Our fears reveal what we worship, and what we worship shapes us. When we fear something other than God, we are placing something in power over us that is not God, giving ourselves multiple masters. This is placing something or someone above Jesus, who says Himself, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other”.<sup>39</sup> When we submit ourselves to two masters we find ourselves committing idolatry.

Theoretically and theologically, this makes sense. If you value something more than God, that thing is an idol. What devastates me for leaders is how we can so easily see the idols in the lives of others while being blind to or, God help us, glossing over our own idolatry. In my leadership, I’ve encountered men who so clearly idolize security, women, pleasure, power, success, and the opinions of others. However, what pains me most is when leading men idolize personal piety and religious knowledge, feigning a Christ-centered life to gain the approval of, or power over, man. When leaders feign their “togetherness” and gloss over their brokenness, the stability of the Church (big C) is in danger, and the glory of our Lord is diminished.

God’s glory is far more important than the image we portray. Why else would the apostle Paul count all that he’s accomplished as a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” “as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus”?<sup>40</sup> Of all people, Paul had ground to stand on. He didn’t have to feign togetherness! He was blameless, *blameless!*, as to the righteousness of the

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew 6:34 ESV

<sup>40</sup> Philippians 3:8 HCSB

law!<sup>41</sup> Yet, in spite of his positioning and righteousness, Paul believed that knowing God was far more valuable! How glorifying it must be to God when we say that we'd rather know Him than be respected for the righteousness we gain through our actions!

Who among us can say that we are blameless like Paul was? I know I'm not, and if you're honest with yourself, I bet you're not either. We don't need scripture to know our lives are jacked up. Heck, just this past week I sacrificed the Biblical call to love in order to maintain my control and power in a conversation. Instead of leading those God called me to love, I took the opportunity to attain power and control over another individual. How unloving, selfish, and sinful is that! It reminds me of the unforgiving slave of Matthew 18. God, being infinitely above me in every way, has given me unending grace and love, yet as a bearer of His image I chose to leverage my positioning and knowledge for my own gain. This is not right! This requires repentance. Thank God for His grace and mercy, for "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".<sup>42</sup>

### **God-Honoring Fear**

Luckily, we have been blessed by God with numerous examples within scripture that portray this God-honoring fear. From Abraham to Moses to David and then the early church members, a fear of God is displayed. Now you may say that the fear of the Lord is an Old Testament practice that is not present or necessary in the church today. You may say that the word reverence or awe may be a better interpretation at least for New Testament passages. However, I must bring up the story of Ananias and Sapphira, members of the the early church that we so often marvel. As most of us know, this couple sold some of their land, kept a portion

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<sup>41</sup> Philippians 3:6 HCSB

<sup>42</sup> 1 John 1:9 ESV

of it, and then laid the rest at the apostles feet saying the money given represented all the profits they received from the land. Both Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead in the presence of the apostles as a result of lying to God.<sup>43</sup> Then what comes next is key to our discussion right now, “and great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things”.<sup>44</sup>

Now, I don’t know about you, but if I hear about God killing the couple next door for lying, I sure as heck am not thinking, “Oh God how magnificent and glorious You are.” I’m freaking out, thinking expletives, and asking for His forgiveness as I think them! I’m scared. I’m fearful. This is not reverence. This is near horror. If those guys died for lying, I know that I’m next because I’ve definitely done worse! That is the fear of the Lord, and it’s supposed to be present in the Church today.

So why don’t we? James, the brother of Jesus, asks “what is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes”.<sup>45</sup> David says that “as for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more”.<sup>46</sup> At some point in our lives, in our existence, we forgot how fragile we are. We read passages like these and blindly agree with no processing. Think about it—if our organs fail, if a tornado or hurricane or some other natural disaster strikes our home, if cancer strikes, if depression overwhelms—we are fragile. God is the only one who is powerful over all. “In Him all things hold together”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Acts 5:1-10

<sup>44</sup> Acts 5:11

<sup>45</sup> James 4:14 ESV

<sup>46</sup> Psalm 103:15-16

<sup>47</sup> Colossians 1:17 ESV

I think one of the best Biblical case studies on the fear of the Lord is found in the book of Isaiah. Upon seeing the Lord of Hosts upon his heavenly throne, surrounded by ghastly<sup>48</sup> seraphim that worshipped God while covering their face and feet, Isaiah cried out “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”<sup>49</sup> Though the Bible does not explicitly say “Isaiah feared the Lord,” I think we can all agree there is no possible way any man could not be scared at that moment.

So Isaiah, the prophet with some of the most compelling prophecies of the coming Messiah, feared the Lord. He did not revere Him, he feared Him. But what comes next is key. *Immediately* after Isaiah’s cry, God sends one of the seraphim to his side, and touching a glowing coal to his mouth the seraphim says, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for”<sup>50</sup> Isaiah’s sins is atoned for. Though I don’t know what would have happened if Isaiah didn’t cry out to God in fear, I do believe this story would have ended much more like that of Ananias and Sapphira. There’s a redemptive principle in here that cannot be missed. Seeing the Lord comes an acknowledgement of who you are in comparison to God, and once realizing this dichotomy, fear settles in the person, thus Isaiah’s cry. From here God, in His infinite power and grace, steps in and atones for our sin. For Isaiah, this occurred through

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<sup>48</sup> Yes, I do mean ghastly. Imagine seeing a creature covered head to toe in eyes, and tell me you’re not afraid. See Revelation 4:6.

<sup>49</sup> Isaiah 6:5 ESV

<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 6:7 ESV



God's choice to send the seraphim.<sup>51</sup> For us, it occurs through the substitutionary atonement that comes from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Subsequently, we see Isaiah get commissioned into his ministry for the Lord. This completes the process. We start with a true fear of the Lord, then continue onto atonement, then end with commissioning. Though this is a descriptive text, I believe that this is a process that occurs in the life of every true child of God.

I think that we don't often fear God is because we rest in the atonement. Though I don't think this is a sin, I do believe that our action discredits God and brings us away from truly worshipping Him. Our fear of God comes from recognizing who we are in relation to Him. It comes when we realize that who we are is a sinner worthy of His wrath. It is from here that true repentance happens and forgiveness found. It is when we fall to our knees that we are commissioned.

As leaders, I believe that we must constantly revisit this fear. It allows us to remember who we are. It humbles us and reminds us of our need for Christ. And it leads us into greater intimacy with Him and enables us to better lead the flock He's blessed us with.

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<sup>51</sup> Though the Bible never says God sent the seraphim, I doubt a creature worshipping God as holy would stop worshipping the holy God to tend the needs of a lowly human, unless commanded to do so. In fact, Revelation 4 says the creatures *never* cease their worship. So, for this act to happen, I believe it must be a result of a command from God who is the only one who could "trump" the act of worship.

### Part 3: Leaders Practice Humility

As a college freshmen, I had *a lot* to learn. Let me say that again. As a college freshman, I had *a lot* to learn.

Of course, at the time I thought I was a genius, put together with a superb wisdom gifted to me by God to change the world and tell everyone else why they're wrong. And yes, I really did think I was that mature. I laugh at freshman year Kyle for many reasons, be it his hugoholism<sup>52</sup> or social obliviousness; however, I also grieve for him. I grieve for him because he was so off-base. If he got a hit in baseball, he'd run to the pitchers mound and complain when tagged out. He was so convinced he had right convictions, that he wouldn't entertain any criticism. He surrounded himself with people who'd support him and his thoughts while maintaining shallow relationships with everyone else. At the time, he was over-involved in ministry, participating in six different Christian-based groups, and submitting to no one but himself.

I want to clarify that, though I was very much off-base, I was still playing the right game. At the core, in my heart of hearts, I truly desired God's will. But a heart of passion with no instruction is bound to veer off course. Just like a car speeding in the fog are those who pursue Christ without submission.

It is by God's grace that I didn't fall into any form of excessive heresy or false teaching. It is also by His grace that He revealed where I had veered off course, and guided me into willful and wholesome submission. Today I stand convinced that a man of God not only appears humble

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<sup>52</sup> a term I pretend to have invented myself that describes a person who always wants hugs, even at the cost of popping the personal bubble of nearly everyone he meets

to the masses but displays humility through a faithful submission to the Holy Spirit (which is the Word of God), a community of believers, and a headship within the church.

### **Holy Spirit**

Submission to the Holy Spirit. How much more metaphysical can Christianity get? I grew up in a church that spoke very little of the Holy Spirit and how He works. Honestly, I do not recollect anyone teaching me anything about the Holy Spirit during my childhood. So, when I first learned about the Holy Spirit and began to understand how He works, it was much like a child learning how to play with fire, which is ironically the analogy often used to describe the Spirit. An analogy that I find to be quite accurate.

As we all know, fire can be beneficially powerful when used correctly; however, fire can also be destructively powerful when used incorrectly. Though the analogy fails when we understand the nature of God and how the Holy Spirit speaks only truth and can never bring destruction that is not according to God's perfect will, the destructive aspect of the analogy comes into play when we misunderstand the Spirit. Destruction comes when we fail to test the spirits that assert authority over us<sup>53</sup>, or worse, we willingly submit to a false authority disguised as the Holy Spirit.

Though I do not wish to go deep into the realm of spiritual warfare, I acknowledge that we must understand how the Spirit works, and in doing this, we will know how the Spirit doesn't work, thus equipping us with the skill set to test the spirits that be. Through this, we can learn the submission to the Holy Spirit and to walk in step with Him.

The most central aspect of the Spirit that is necessary for us to understand here is *not* how

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<sup>53</sup> 1 John 4:1

the Holy Spirit acts (i.e.: inspire revelation, spiritual gifts, etc.) but what the Holy Spirit teaches. Of all things, we must understand that the Holy Spirit works alongside the word of God revealed in the Bible. This is displayed in Ephesians 6, where Paul explains armor of God to the saints and believers of Ephesus. In verse 17 of chapter six, Paul teaches that we are equipped with “the sword of the Spirit, which *is* God’s word”.<sup>54</sup> Here Paul makes a clear distinction that the sword of the Spirit *is* the word of God. Semantically speaking, this is a definition of the sword of the Spirit, not a correlation between the sword of the Spirit and the word of God. So, if the Bible is the sword of the Spirit, then the Spirit should never reveal something that contradicts the Bible, otherwise the Spirit would be contradicting Himself, which God explicitly states in 2 Timothy 2:13, “[God] cannot deny Himself.”

For this reason, we can know that in submitting ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we are also submitting ourselves to the revealed word of God in the Bible. We then also know that when the Holy Spirit acts through means outside of the Word—be it divine revelation, prophecy, visions, dreams, tongues, etc.—what is taught *must* correlate with the word of God. If a spirit speaks what is contrary to the Bible or does not “confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh,” that spirit is not from God and should not be submitted to.<sup>55</sup>

As leaders, we must know the word of God so that we can fully submit to the Spirit and be able to discern what is true. Being grounded in the word of God is absolutely essential as we submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Paul gave Titus detailed directions in how to appoint elders, listing specific qualifications that men must meet in order to lead. Of these qualifications, Paul said an appointed man must “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be

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<sup>54</sup> Ephesians 6:17, emphasis added

<sup>55</sup> 1 John 4:2-3

able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it".<sup>56</sup>

It is my hope that we, as leaders, are submissive to the Spirit. I pray that we actively seek God in His word so that we can effectively test the spirits and discern truth from falsehood as we place ourselves under the authority of scriptures. This is absolutely essential for any leader's walk with God as he leads the flock God has apportioned to him.

### **Community of Believers**

This is one aspect of leadership that I am most passionate about. There is no reason why a leader should avoid submission to a community of fellow believers. I believe that in seclusion heresy and apostasy take root. Community is advised in prescriptive texts and modeled in descriptive texts throughout the Bible.

Through the writer of Hebrews, God calls us into community so that we remain under the truth of His word while encouraging one another toward the mission He's called us all into.<sup>57</sup> In Ephesians, Paul explains that the church is a body that works together so that, when each part works properly, the body builds itself up and grows underneath the headship of Christ.<sup>58</sup> Through both these texts, we can learn that we all have been called to work together, and it is through working together that growth and maturity occur.

These two passages apply to all believers, not just leaders. However, I believe this universal application to all of God's children is necessary for leaders to understand and submit to. Leaders, we need community as much as the man who gave his life to Christ yesterday! We are not above this, we are of this. If a leader does not humble himself to be sharpened by another,

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<sup>56</sup> Titus 1:9 ESV

<sup>57</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25

<sup>58</sup> Ephesians 4:15-16

how does that leader grow? How does that man promote the growth and building up of the body? Even if that man is a finger made to touch the lives of others, how can that finger move if it's not connected to the metacarpal that is absolutely necessary in performing the command sent by the head, Jesus? Sadly, if a man does not work in community with other believers, he loses his means of connecting with Christ. If you dislocate your finger, it becomes far more difficult to move. As a leader, never dislocate yourself from the body of Christ. In your faithfulness, God will use you lead your flock into active community as well.

### **Headship of the Church**

Submitting to a community of believers is one thing that is necessary for Biblical leaders and for all Christians. A necessary addition to this is a submission to a leadership greater than yourself. There are numerous accounts in the Bible where this submission to greater leadership occurs.

- *The Israelites submitted to the leadership of the Levites in Nehemiah*  
- *Nehemiah 8-10*
- *Judah's king Uzziah submitted himself to the authority of Zechariah*  
- *2 Chronicles 26*
- *Judah's king Hezekiah submitted himself to the authority of Isaiah*  
- *2 Kings 19*
- *Elisha submitted himself to the leadership and authority of Elijah*  
- *2 Kings 2*
- *The twelve disciples submitted themselves to the authority Jesus*  
- *The Gospels*
- *Those of the early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching"*  
- *Acts 2:42 ESV*
- *Titus and Timothy submitted themselves to the authority of Paul*  
- *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*

Today, we may not have prophets like the king's Uzziah and Hezekiah did. We also may not have one of the twelve apostles leading us, and neither do we have Jesus, in flesh, walking with us. However, we do have leaders appointed and called by God to develop, guide, and equip us. In the book of Ephesians, Paul clearly describes the leadership that God appoints over the body of believers (which includes over us leaders). This leadership consists of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.<sup>59</sup> The role of these leaders is to build up the body of Christ and to equip the saints<sup>60</sup> for the work of service.<sup>61</sup> We all need these leaders in our lives, lest we fall into false teachings and resist unity within the body of believers. Paul says God uses these leaders to bring us into maturity, "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes".<sup>62</sup> This loose grip on the true doctrine of the gospel is exactly what Paul warned his disciple Timothy about. We read in 1 Timothy that Paul urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus so that Timothy could "charge<sup>63</sup> certain persons not to teach any different doctrine".<sup>64</sup> These persons<sup>65</sup> had "wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they [were] saying or the things about which they [made] confident assertions".<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ephesians 4:11

<sup>60</sup> The children of God

<sup>61</sup> Ephesians 4:12

<sup>62</sup> Ephesians 4:14 ESV

<sup>63</sup> Paul also clarifies that this charge is one of gentleness as he says "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Timothy 1:5)

<sup>64</sup> 1 Timothy 1:3 ESV

<sup>65</sup> Though it's not certain, one could speculate that these persons are leading in some capacity, for how can one teach without any listeners and learners. Otherwise, that person is simply speaking and not teaching.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Timothy 1:6b-7

These people needed Timothy to direct them. They desired to be teachers, which itself is neither good or bad.<sup>67</sup> However, without proper guidance they fell into false teachings while incorrectly asserting the truth of the word of God. This is blaspheme. Brothers, we do not want to fall into blaspheme, lest we come to honor ourselves over God. We need men like Timothy to lead us, and if our Timothy's don't have a Paul, we must be wary to follow without knowing that they too are submitting to a higher authority. One should never lead until first being led. We serve out of our overflow, not out of our reserves.

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<sup>67</sup> Though James warns that "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." (James 3:1)



### **Bringing it Together**

As leaders, we are called into an intimate and passionate relationship with God. This is our first priority, and it always will be. Without God as our source, our power, our purpose, and our hope, we will burn-out, lose focus, and sacrifice hope we are called to proclaim. We cannot lead without knowing Jesus intimately and pursuing Him passionately. Part of this relationship is a healthy fear of our Lord. When we realize who we are in relation to Him, we come to face three life-directing realities. First, we realize how messed up we truly, knowing that we need help; then we come to realize God's expectations and power, knowing we've fallen so desperately short bringing wrath upon ourselves. Finally, we realize how God's grace enacted through Jesus Christ restores us, knowing that we are freed and love in Him. This humbles us, for we know we are receiving what we do not deserve, and this humility brings us into submission—submission to the Holy Spirit, to a community of believers, to the headship of the Church.

This should mark the life of a leader. A leader cannot, and should not, lead if he does not understand and practice these things. No one is perfect. We all make mistakes. But leaders live a life of constant repentance as they search out the Lord in all they think, say, and do. If you fall outside of these characteristics, take heart. God is faithful. He will not give up on you. Don't give up on yourself, or worse, give up on God. Pray for His sanctifying power to renew you day by day. Place yourself in a healthy community. Ask for guidance from good counsel. Pursue the Lord as if He is your first love, the love of your life. For that is who He is. And He deserves to be viewed as such. May God bless you as you seek Him first. And may He use you to lead others to do the same.

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