

LEAD - by Paul Tripp

Introduction

"I celebrate the wonderful, vibrant, and healthy churches that I partner with around the world. I love the energy that we are pouring into church planting and church revitalization... I am not at all depressed; I am excited. But I am concerned that weaknesses in the leadership community have the power to not only weaken the function and witness of what appears to be a very healthy church but may also, in what seems to be an instant, cast that church into a quagmire that can damage and divert its ministry for a long time."

"The foundation of everything proposed in this book about the shape, character, and function of the leadership community of the church of Jesus Christ is this: the model for the community that is the church, and most importantly its leadership, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, I know that this seems both obvious and vague, but I am persuaded that it is neither, and that if the primary driving force of leadership in local churches around the world was the gospel of Jesus Christ, many of the sad things we have seen happen in the lives of leaders and their churches would not have happened."

12 Gospel principles for leadership (to protect leaders and bless them with long, healthy ministry life)

1. Achievement

"We should be hard workers, questing to achieve great things in God's name. We should be leaders with an ever-expanding vision for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ... We should never become achievement satisfied, because there is always more gospel work to do. But we must always remind one another that achievement is a spiritual minefield. Achievement has the power to change us—to change who we think we are and what we think we are capable of doing. Sadly, achievement can turn humble servant leaders into proud, controlling, and unapproachable mini-kings."

2. Gospel

A leadership community formed by the gospel is:

- nurturing a love for Jesus

"The most powerful protection from the dangers that every leader faces is not his relationship to his fellow leaders but a heart that is ruled by deeply rooted love for Jesus. It is love for Jesus that has the power to crush leader pride. It is love for Jesus that ignites and protects our love for one another. It is love for Jesus that turns ministry achievement from a cause for self-glory into a reason to worship. It is love for Jesus that protects a leader from both fear of man and fear of failure."

- honest to confess sin
- humbled dependent on God
- patient to see what God is doing
- forgiving of one another
- encouraging of one another
- protective of one other
- restorative - but not soft on sin

3. Limits (set by God)

"If you're a leader, you don't know everything, you can't do everything, you aren't completely mature, and you don't have inexhaustible energy. You are not just a package of strengths, gifts, and experiences; you are also a collection of weaknesses and susceptibilities. It is here that the gospel is such a sweet encouragement. We do not have to fear our limits because God doesn't send us out on our own; where he sends us, he goes too. We do not have to curse our weaknesses because our weaknesses are a workroom for his grace. We do not have to hide or deny our places of immaturity because God is able. Our limits and weaknesses are not in the way of what God can do through us, but our denial of limits and our delusions of independent strength are."

- gifts
- time
- energy (looking after our physical bodies)
- maturity (sanctification is a process)

"Until we are on the other side, we will live, minister, relate, and live with limits. Those limits are not in the way of what God intends to do through us, because they are all the product of his wise and loving choice. What he calls us to is possible to do inside the limits that God has set...We must resist the temptation to live outside those limits or to make the assumption that we are all dealing with our limits in ways that are humble and wise. God is not afraid to call limited people into gospel leadership, so we should not be afraid, with gospel humility and hope, to put those limits on the table, not just once, but again and again."

4. Balance (everything in its right place doing what it was meant to do in the way God intended it to be done)

Signs of balance

Signs of a heart out of balance

"Marriage and family problems

Workaholism

Lack of commitment to a regular devotional life

No regular commitment to sabbaths of rest

Unhealthy ministry or leadership relationships

Lack of regular, meaningful connection to the fellowship and mutual ministry of the body of Christ

Debt

Unwholesome communication

Anger

Discouragement, depression, or burnout

Physical ill health

Resistance to loving criticism and spiritual care

Domineering or controlling manner

Unreconciled relationships"

5. Character

"The reason we are often way too passive in the face of troubling evidence in the attitudes and actions of a leader is that way too often, performance trumps character. I have heard statements like the ones below repeatedly:

"But he was such a gifted preacher."

"But look at the numbers of people who have come to Christ."

"But look how our church has grown."

“But think about the number of churches we have planted.”

“But look at the gospel resources he has produced.”

Few leadership communities say that they have come to value performance over character, but performance becomes the logic behind not dealing with issues of character.”

6. War

“Leadership in the church of Jesus Christ is not just a battle for theological faithfulness, gospel purity, and methodological integrity; it is also always a war for the heart of every leader. Many more leaders fail because they have lost the battle for their heart than because of shifts in their theology or view of the gospel. In fact, it is often the case that theological wandering is but a visible symptom of a heart that has already wandered.”

“We’re not just leaders, building the household of faith; we are also soldiers under attack on the battlefield of faith. How many more casualties of war are we going to lose before we begin to take seriously the war that rages around us and inside us?”

- accept and be aware of your weaknesses

“If your leadership community functions as a gospel community, then your humble confession of personal areas of weakness won’t be dangerous because it will be greeted with mercy-infused understanding, intercessory prayer, and strategies for help—all fuelled by confidence in the presence and grace of the Saviour. What is dangerous are naïve assumptions of peacetime safety and proud assessments of personal invulnerability that silence a conversation that every leader needs to have regularly with those in his leadership community. The gospel welcomes us to be honest because it offers divine aid for everything we would need to be honest about. And, finally, we must not let our desire to be respected by fellow leaders keep us from confessing where we are under attack and where we tend to succumb.”

-talk and pray about this battle

“Spiritual warfare, if it’s as normal as the Bible presents it, must always be on our ministry agenda. The battle is ongoing; we will either recognise it in and around us and respond appropriately as a leadership community, or we will function as if it does not exist, and in so doing, expose our leadership community to danger. ”

-examine and defend ourselves

“It is so important to understand that the primary tool the enemy uses to attack, disable, defeat, and set aside ministry leaders is ministry...Ministry leadership is not a fortress against spiritual attack; it’s the front line.”

7. Servants

“Why do ministry leaders get mad when someone disagrees with them or questions their plans? Why are ministry leaders intimidated by the gifts of other leaders? Why do leaders treat the people around them as if they are there to serve them instead of the other way around? Why do ministry leaders speak disrespectfully to fellow leaders or support staff? Why do ministry leaders avoid tough conversations that need to be had?The answer to all these questions is that it’s so hard for us to willingly, patiently, joyfully, lovingly, and sacrificially serve.”

“The call to a life of joyful servitude and willing suffering is itself a grace. In calling me to deny myself, God is freeing me from my bondage to me...” “This is the upside-down world of ministry calling. The pathway to freedom is servanthood, the pathway to greatness is slavery, and the pathway to deep and lasting joy—joy that people and circumstance cannot take away—is denying yourself.”

“Suffering servanthood is at the very heart of the gospel message. Shouldn’t it also be at the very heart of our gospel mission and functionality as church and ministry leaders? Is it not possible to be on gospel mission yet deny that very mission in the way that we think about and conduct ourselves?”

8. Candour

“It is quite possible to be committed to leading robust gospel ministries and yet be denying the same gospel in your leadership community. Hiding in fear, silence, denial, defensiveness, and a vacuum of humble candour is more of the culture of broken Eden than of victorious Calvary. At the heart of the wonderful new and radically different life that we are welcomed to, based on the person and sacrifice of Jesus, is the welcome to confession. We are lovingly called out of the darkness, out from behind the trees into the open and the light, not because we don’t have things to hide but because grace means we no longer have to hide them. ”

What stops candour?

- pride

“Pride and confession are enemies. They do not work in cooperation but in constant opposition. If ministry has come to define you, the gospel won’t.”

- minimising sin

“As long as sin is inside us, we all carry with us a dangerous ability to participate in our own spiritual blindness. It should be a warning to every leadership community everywhere that all members of your community are regularly tempted to think that their sin is something less than sin. ”

- care too much about what others think of us

- our identity is in ministry

“If ministry leadership is your identity, then Christ isn’t...This will produce either pride in success or fear of failure but never the kind of humility and courage of heart that results in humble, willing, confessing approachability”

- functional gospel doubt

“Leaders can’t imagine how their confession will turn out well, so they hide behind silence, denials, or non-answers. Rather than being thankful for the ever-present grace that is theirs in Christ and the community of grace that surrounds them, they doubt rescuing and forgiving grace and fear the very people tasked with being tools of that grace...Here’s what every leadership community needs to affirm: to come out of hiding produces good, to admit what you have denied produces good, to confess sin produces good, to own where you are weak produces good, and to say no to pride and cry out for help, even if there is wreckage along the way, produces good.”

9. Identity

“Every leader in every leadership community is doing his or her work out of some sense of identity. It is neither accurate nor safe to assume that ministry leaders always function, at street level, out of their identity in Christ. A ministry leader’s identity is a place of temptation and a spiritual battleground and, sadly, does not always remain constant. It is clear to me that a significant aspect of the drift and then fall of ministry leaders begins

with an identity exchange. This exchange is not a dramatic event but rather a subtle and often long-term process.”

“Ministry leadership really is a miserable, spiritually dangerous, and leader-destroying place to look for identity. Nothing good is produced in a leader who has along the way exchanged identity in Christ for some form of identity in ministry.”

“Your Lord knows the sin and weakness of the people he has chosen to lead his church. He knows there are times when we look to the wrong things for our spiritual stability. He knows that at times we are too fearful, too controlling, too proud, too sensitive, and too needy of affirmation and success. He knows all our susceptibilities, yet he still chose us to lead his people on his redemptive mission. He is not shocked or dismayed by our struggle, and he surely is not about to give up on us. He meets us in our weaknesses... exposes our hearts, and then draws us near once again and says, “I’ve called you to my service, not because you are able but because I am. Rest your heart on my grace and don’t look elsewhere for what only I can give you.” And with those tender, loving words he grants us yet again another fresh start and new beginning.”

10. Restoration

“Leader restoration is not a romantic dream of people who don’t really understand how deep and serious sin is. Restoration gets at the heart of the gospel that we have given ourselves to. And even if sin necessitates a leader’s removal from his position and ministry duties, turning toward him with grace is always right. We sinners don’t just need forgiving grace; we need reconciling grace. And we don’t just need reconciling grace; we need restoring grace. And we don’t just need restoring grace; we need delivering grace. It is beautiful to see the power of restorative grace up close and personal, and it is sad to see that so many leadership communities don’t actually trust its power when a key leader’s sin has been revealed by the divine restorer.”

“Assumptions that a leadership community makes about the spiritual condition of its leaders, assumptions that allow the community to be passive rather than pastoral, result in a shocked and unprepared community when a fellow leader falls in some way and needs restorative care.”

“In the first way, a leadership community, in their inability to believe what has been revealed about a leader they thought they knew and could trust, rises almost immediately to the leader’s defence...The result is that the leader does not get the convicting and restorative care he needs from the community of grace that surrounds him. Even worse, the sin that has gripped his heart and begun to control his life is given room to grow even deeper roots and take a firmer hold.”

“In the second way, the leadership group is again unprepared for God-given moments of restorative calling. In their shock over what has happened, they feel deceived and duped. Compassion for the one caught in sin is replaced by anger. Pastoral care gives way to adversarial responses, which are more punitive than pastoral. ”

“Restoration never minimises the damaging reality of sin, but while it takes sin seriously, it also believes in the power of restorative grace. It believes in God’s power to turn a heart and rebuild a life... “And may we remember, with honesty and humility of heart, that the grace we extend to others is always the grace we also need ourselves. May our hearts be filled with gratitude as we consider that we have all been restored by God’s grace...And

may that gratitude of heart shape our response to fellow leaders when sin rears its ugly head.”

11. Longevity

“Every leader needs the ministry of other leaders in order to grow to the kind of maturity that will allow him to lead well over the long term and end well”

“Too many leaders are knocked over by the storms of life in this fallen world. Too many leaders leave ministry fallen or broken in some way. Too many leaders have short-term ministries. Too many leaders fail to experience the joyful fruitfulness of ministry longevity. And let me say here that ministry longevity is not just about hanging in there for a long time but about growing in maturity...”

12. Presence

“If it’s possible to look at creation and not see the glory and presence of the one who created it all and controls it to this day, then it is also possible to look at your ministry and forget that every good thing there is the work of hands greater than your own.”

“What every ministry leader will face he cannot endure or defeat on his own, and this is precisely why God has promised that he would not think of leaving you and that forsaking you is simply out of the question.”

“This book is not about the strategic work of the ministry leadership community but about protecting and preserving its spiritual depth so it may do its work with long-term fruitfulness. Really, this book is about the Lord of the church, about his love for the ambassadors he has called to represent him, and how he meets their every need with glorious and faithful grace.”

All excerpts from: Paul David Tripp. “Lead”.