RICK JAMES

LEADING *with* COURAGE *and* HUMILITY

Rick James

Leading with courage and humility

Digni pym

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Dedication

To Joanna and David – who have shown me the meaning of courage;

To Patrick – an example of authentic humility in church leadership; and

To Tobias – my role model of a leader and friend.

Foreword

This book is a joint publication of both Digni and PYM. We have worked together for almost 30 years in many aspects of development – though this is our first joint venture in publishing. *Leading with courage and humility* is the product of a learning network that PYM supports with funding from Digni – the Competence Sharing Network Project (CSNP). We believe that their learning about leadership needs to be shared more broadly.

Both Digni and PYM are committed to the practice of partners learning from each other. Digni organizes two or three network meetings in different parts of the world every year. PYM has supported two on-going learning networks of their partners in Africa (the CSNP and another focused on Early Childhood education). Network members themselves are excited by this new focus on South-South dialogue.

PYM and Digni both believe in the importance of good stewardship of the resources we have been entrusted with. We want to make the biggest difference possible in the lives of the poor with the limited funding that we have. We therefore strive to steward our own resources well and also encourage our members and partners to do the same. We believe that church agencies should be setting an example in the fight against any form of corruption. This often involves strengthening organizations, including financial and human resource management. To become the Christian agencies we are called to be requires leadership at all levels.

This is why PYM was so pleased when our partners in the CSNP decided the focus of their 2011 network meeting should be on leadership. Since they started meeting together and learning in 2006, it became more and more obvious that members were hungry to learn more about leadership and management. They found that to implement any technical improvements in the projects still required leadership.

CSNP asked Rick James to help facilitate this learning event. In preparation for the event, he got each of the participants to write up their own 'story' of leadership. They then used their own experiences to extract learning about leadership. The learning event went so well that at the end they were challenged to share what they had learnt more broadly – with others

who had not had the privilege of being there. But they knew that if they wrote up the usual workshop report, no-one would read it and it would only gather dust on a shelf somewhere. So CSNP decided instead to do something a bit more creative and courageous. They asked Rick to write it up as a book. *Leading with courage and humility* is the end product.

We trust that by reading it you will be touched. We believe your own leadership will be improved. And by strengthening your leadership you will be able to make more of a difference in the lives of the people we are called to serve.

Oslo September 2012

Jørn Lemvik	Torild Almnes
General Secretary	Director of Humanitarian and Development Aid
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1. The character of leadership

Do you remember how you felt when you first took on a leadership role? It might have been a new job, a promotion in the church, leading a group, even becoming a parent. You may, like me, have felt a confusion of emotions... Excited, overwhelmed, delighted and daunted all at the same time… At the start, we were stirred to do something different – to create something new and meaningful. But, for many of us, the actual experience of leadership turned out to be very different from how we imagined it might be. It was much harder than we thought. In fact, there was more blood, sweat and tears than victory celebrations.

No amount of talks, books or how-to guides can prepare us for the inherent challenge and complexity of leading people. As Dan Allender warns us, 'Leading is very likely the most costly thing you will ever do. And the chances are that it will never bring you riches or fame or praise in exchange for your great sacrifices' (Allender, 2006, page 2). Many of us wonder why leadership is so difficult and how we can do it better. We yearn for something more in our leadership. If you share this yearning, then read on.

The key focus of this book is character and how it influences our leadership. How we lead is a direct reflection of who we are. Great leaders are people of integrity. As Christian leaders, our character is profoundly affected by our relationship with God – how closely we are *following* Jesus.

Crucially, to lead others well, we must have a clear sense of our own direction. First and foremost, we must be a 'good leader of our own life'. It is only by developing good self-leadership that we develop the capabilities to be able to lead others well. Good self-leadership comes down to:

- Following a clear **calling**
- Summoning radical **courage**
- Cultivating authentic **humility**
- Being rigorously **self-disciplined**.

These four elements are inter-related and mutually reinforcing. When any one of them is absent, the others are severely weakened. There is nothing more important in leadership than developing these aspects of

our character. Learning the practical skills needed to lead is much more straightforward.

In thinking about our leadership, we may well ask ourselves: 'Why should anyone be led by me?'[1] If we lead with calling, courage, humility and self-discipline, then this will have a positive impact on the individuals, groups and organisations we lead. Good self-leadership provides us with the emotional and spiritual resources to:

- **Inspire and empower our staff** – treating them as individuals with dignity
- **Create more room for** God's presence in our organisations – making space for grace.

Most of us feel dissatisfied with our leadership and long for more, for ourselves, for those we lead and for our organisations. The 'more' we have been longing for in our leadership is the presence of God in the midst of our day-to-day dealings. Discovering where and how God is at work is what makes leadership effective and exciting – and ultimately it is what brings transformation.

The diagram below illustrates the inter-relationship of these elements of character in good leadership and the positive fruit they bear:

[1] Goffee and Jones (2000)

Where has this book come from?

This book emerged from a learning network of African NGOs called the Competence Sharing Network Project. These NGOs meet every year for one week to learn from each other. In 2011, project leaders were grappling with questions of leadership such as:

- How can I be an effective leader?
- What are the qualities of a wise leader?
- How can I evaluate myself to know if I am leading in the right way?
- What can I do better in my position that I am not doing already?
- Where and how will I get what I need to grow as a leader?

So, leadership became the focus of the 2011 learning event in Swaziland. In preparation, every participant submitted their story about leadership – accounts which form the basis of this book and which are interwoven throughout the text. They show how we all have experiences of leadership to learn from. We trust that these stories inspire you and encourage you to lead with more courage and humility.

CSNP was conceived at a seminar organised by PYM in Nairobi in December 2004. PYM partners from Southern and Eastern Africa felt that their interaction had been so beneficial that it would be valuable to have an annual event to exchange experiences and learning. NORAD has funded this network through Digni and PYM since 2006. The network has focused on increasing its members' capacity for development work by learning from each other.

Why is being a leader so tough?

We are all leaders in particular situations. Anyone who has someone following them is a leader. We might be leaders at home, at school, at work or at church. Parents are leaders. Bishops are leaders. Project managers are leaders. Leadership is not just at the top of an organisation, but can be distributed across all levels. It assumes many different guises. But one thing that seems to be common to all experiences of leadership is that it is almost never easy.

Perhaps we should not be too surprised by this. After all, no leader in the Bible had an easy time. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, to name just a few... they all faced incredible challenges and opposition from outside as well as from their own people. The experiences of Jesus and his disciples show that it did not get any easier in the New Testament either.

Leadership is difficult for a number of reasons. Leadership is not about one person – it is a relationship between people. Therefore, our leadership is profoundly affected by others' behaviour, not just our own. Followers' expectations of their leaders exert a powerful influence. Why do we so frequently see people change when they take power? All too many political leaders take office to redress the autocratic extremes of their predecessors, only to become the type of leader they once despised. Perhaps it is not solely because they change, but also because the way people behave towards them changes.

Many leaders, however good they are, also suffer because followers have unreasonable expectations. Followers are deeply ambivalent about leadership. On the one hand, people want their leaders to be different so they can look up to them and even put them on a pedestal. They want leaders to be perfect. Yet, on the other hand, they want leaders to be approachable and human, people just like them, people who share their values and opinions. Inevitably, leaders do not measure up on either count.

Leading in churches or Christian organisations is probably even harder than in secular contexts. Followers expect their leaders to be almost divine – to be totally compassionate, to be all-knowing, to be everywhere at once, to solve every problem and even to speak with the voice of God. Living up to such expectations is impossible.

The story below is a vivid illustration of how we can be torn apart by different people's expectations. It shows that Christian leadership and the church are not immune – far from it.

Persecuted by my own church

I never expected to be persecuted by my own church. I thought leading a Pentecostal church NGO would be a really positive and uplifting experience. How wrong I was. It turned out to be the most difficult time of my life. Even today I find it deeply uncomfortable to remember.

It all came down to use of assets. The local church wanted to use the NGO's buildings and vehicles. The church expected me to agree to everything they wanted, even if it was against our NGO's policies. I was torn between pleasing my pastor and honestly upholding organisational policies. I couldn't agree with everything the church members demanded. They could not separate my administrative duties from my Christian life, so labelled me '*a bad Christian*' and '*a very stiff-necked woman with an evil heart*'.

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There were so many lies and untruths spoken about me. I was ostracised. I overheard one church member remark: '*You cannot touch that woman. That one is a Norwegian, not an African. She forgets that we paid a fortune to buy that plot. Now she acts as if it is hers.*'

There was even a time when my pastor would hardly greet me. When he came to the NGO offices by the church, he would park his car a long way away and avoid walking anywhere near me. This really hurt me. I was advised not to talk to him as it would be taken as provocation. His wife sent me messages rather than speaking to me in person.

Formal meetings between the church and the NGO were fraught. Whenever I had to present a progress report to the church, I knew there was going to be war. I knew church members would attack me. It was not about the work. It had become personal.

Any leadership takes place in a very specific cultural context. Different cultures perceive what constitutes 'good leadership' in different ways. Every context provides challenges to leadership – whether in Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa or Asia. Most of the stories in this book come from leadership in Africa. But the challenges and human issues they raise are universal. Ultimately, people are people wherever they live.

African leaders and writers have highlighted some of the specific challenges for leaders in Africa. Julius Oladipo points out that, in many parts of Africa, the way followers expect leaders to behave may be deeply unhealthy. He observes that often leaders are still seen as the 'Big Man'.[2] Leaders are expected to be all-powerful, all-knowing, all-owning, all-pervasive, infallible and permanent (Oladipo, 2005). The same can be applied to church leaders in Africa, making it harder for them to remain humble and authentic.

[2] Julius

Another danger in such circumstances is that followers abdicate responsibility to the leader. These proverbs from Malawi speak volumes:

Two cocks do not crow in one kraal. (There can only be one leader, so if others are talking they are competing with the leader.)

A big head will not dodge the fists. (The leader is responsible for sorting out all our problems)

If a duck with a long beak cannot pick it up, then a chicken certainly cannot. (If a leader cannot solve something, then the followers certainly cannot)

He is old... therefore he is right. (A leader's decision is not open to discussion)

This 'Big Man' stereotype can also make it more difficult for women in leadership. Women leaders may be subject to a wide variety of cultural expectations which deny them opportunities to lead or undermine their ability to do so, as the story below illustrates.

Standing up to cultural expectations

In 1991, I married a man whom I did not love. I had fallen pregnant and my mother did not want the embarrassment of living with a pregnant daughter. It was an unhappy marriage, but one which produced three children. In early 1998, my husband was in a horrific car crash. He was badly hurt and developed serious health complications. He was confined in hospital for three months before he eventually died. The curtain fell on my world and the future looked very dark. My parents-in-law insisted that I follow their traditions of sleeping with another man in order to 'drive away the evil spirit'.

As a young Christian widow, I did not feel I could follow these traditions. But when I refused, I became an object of hate. They wanted everything that was in my possession, including my children. I was forced to leave home and go to Nairobi to find a job to support my three young children. My prayers bore fruit. In 1999, I got employed by a church literacy project as an assistant coordinator. I am still there today. I often think that, if I had followed their expectations of me, I would never have become a leader. I would never have been able to lead a project to empower women throughout my country.

Such cultural challenges are not unique to Africa. Every society has expectations which present particular challenges to leadership. To avoid being manipulated by these expectations, we first need to understand how leadership is viewed in our own culture.

Yet, there are some things that seem universal in almost every context. As leaders, we will not be universally popular. We will cause offence. One of the key reasons for this is that, in today's fast-changing world, any good leader has to be a leader of change. They have to help their organisation, whether it be a church, an NGO, a business or a government department, to adapt to new realities. This is far from easy. Bringing change is not popular with everyone. As historian and diplomat, Niccolò Machiavelli, observed some 500 years ago:

> 'There is nothing more difficult to execute, nor more dubious of success, nor more dangerous to administer than to introduce a new order of things, for he who introduces it has all those who profit from the old order as his enemies, and he has only lukewarm allies in all those who might profit from the new.' Machiavelli (1513)

Today, leaders must be agile in the face of change. Our contexts are changing rapidly and in unpredictable ways. Leaders have to make informed guesses about the future in order to make decisions and move forward. We have to persuade others to follow us when there is no guarantee of success. We will not always get it right. At times, we will fail. People will blame us.

Not surprisingly, then, leadership is lonely. The higher you rise in leadership, the fewer your real friends at work. Few friendships can survive one person having significant authority over the other. People relate to you differently. They are rarely as open with you as they used to be. Leaders carry many burdens for others. Yet, they often feel unappreciated and can even sometimes feel betrayed. Dan Allender writes, 'If you lead, you will eventually serve with Judas or Peter. Betrayal in some form is as sure as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west' (Allender, 2006, page 31).

Not surprisingly, leaders become tired and worn out. In their exhaustion, they can be sorely tempted. Jesus' words can feel such a long way from the reality of most Christian leadership: 'For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'[3]

[3] Matthew 11:30

Because leadership is such a challenge, it needs to be a clear **calling** – something you feel you have to do, whether you like it or not. We explore the characteristics of calling in Chapter 1.

A reluctance to lead is no bad thing. At many points in the Bible, God chose leaders who did not want to serve: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jonah, to name but a few. Reluctant leaders may be less easily seduced by power, pride or ambition. They know that their calling to lead may seem a bit ridiculous, but they are prepared to be a fool for Christ. Reluctant leaders do not aspire to hold power. In fact, many would count it a blessing to be able to hand leadership over to others. They are constantly looking for successors.

So, as this book explores, leadership is tough – but has many rewards. As one General Secretary of the Swedish Mission Council said of his time as a leader, 'What I found was much worse than I had imagined… The next couple of years were the toughest time in my life... but also, looking back, the best time of my life.' The command that we should be a 'living sacrifice'[4] takes on new meaning for many Christian leaders. We learn what it is like to follow Jesus' example of carrying his cross to his death. In the extreme experiences we go through as leaders, we meet not only our true selves but, more importantly, the God who made us.

Why should anyone be led by you?

If we have accepted the responsibility of leadership, we soon come up against a difficult question: 'Why should anyone be led by you?' Yes, we may have experiences, wisdom and gifts from God. But we also bring our weaknesses to leadership. None of us is anywhere near perfect. Ultimately, our only qualifications to lead come from our character. Followers respond to our character, not our words or our qualifications or our titles. As Peter Scazzero says, 'The key to successful spiritual leadership has more to do with the leader's internal life than with the leader's expertise, gifts or experience' (Scazzero, 2003, page 20). Followers look to follow someone with integrity of character.

The word 'character' originates in the ancient Greek for a 'sharp stylus'. It is an instrument to carve or mark something. Walter Wright says, 'It all starts with character – who we are – because who we are shapes everything

[4] Romans 12:1

we do and everyone we touch' (Wright, 2006, page 4). Our characters are not fixed. They can improve. But our integrity can also quickly disintegrate, as the story below illustrates.

When integrity fades

I remember with great pain a friend and leader whom I will call Mavuto. He was one the most impressive church NGO leaders I have worked with. I learnt so much from his commitment and determination. He was asked to speak internationally about his work with street children. He was made a pastor in his Pentecostal church. Yet, in a relatively short space of time, it all went horribly wrong. He began bending and then breaking organisational policies on finances. Staff quickly lost trust. They complained to the NGO's founders. Mavuto came down very harshly on his team. Gradually, the good staff left. Donors lost confidence. Eventually, the church sacked him, but without following due process. Mavuto responded by taking his church to court, bankrupting the NGO and destroying much of the work with the street children.

The most profound influence on our character comes from our relationship with God. Our character is a reflection of our faith and beliefs. The gods we follow (ambition? wealth?) form our characters. And our characters shape our leadership. When Moses asked, 'Why should they follow me?'[5], God told him that the people would follow Moses because he had met God, because he knew God's name deep in his being. The apostle Paul said, 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.'[6]

Paul's words reveal a profound paradox of leadership. Certainly, leadership is about your character but ultimately your leadership is not about you. It is about how God is able to work through you. It is our on-going relationship with God that gives us the faith to create spaces where God can work and transform the people we work with and the organisation we work in.

As this book will explore in depth, the two key virtues in the character of a leader are:

- **Courage –** to following God's leading even when you are afraid.
- **Humility –** to accept you are not 'in charge' and learn from failure.

[5] Exodus 3 and 4
[6] 1 Corinthians 11:1

Humility and courage in combination are a potent mix in leadership. And during times of change, they are absolutely essential. As this book explores, courage and humility are only cultivated by having the self-discipline to care for our self and our soul. And that, in essence, means committing ourselves to seeking God and drawing ever closer to him.

Where will this book take you?

The message of this book is simple: good leadership starts with self-leadership. We need a clear calling, radical courage, authentic humility and rigorous self-discipline. If we have these things, this will provide us with the emotional and spiritual resources to be able to lead others effectively and to invite God's transforming presence into the day-to-day work of our organisation. As we said before, God's presence is the missing element we so yearn for in our leadership.

This book will therefore focus on:

Calling (chapter 2)**:**
To inspire others to follow us, we need to be 'called'. A calling is a revelation from God about the unique purpose for our lives. It is about becoming the person we were created to be. It is not self-centred, but about serving others. A calling is something beyond our human ability, something that requires perseverance and courage.

Courage (chapter 3)**:**
To be a good leader demands courage. We need courage to overcome our natural fears. We need courage to be decisive when the future outcome is uncertain or when we know our decisions will hurt other people. We need courage to respond to inevitable crises by listening and engaging, not fighting or fleeing. Sometimes, we need courage simply to sit with the pain of impossible situations.

Humility (chapter 4):
To remain open to learning and to avoid the destructive temptation of pride, leaders need humility. Our capacity to change our organisations is directly linked to our capacity to change ourselves. Cultivating authentic humility enables us to get the best out of others.

Self-discipline (chapter 5):
All we really bring to leadership is ourselves. To care for ourselves is therefore good stewardship. We need the self-discipline to dare to know ourselves deeply, to manage our time, to have fun with friends and also to invest in our personal relationship with God. It is not about being perfect but about being real, with all our weaknesses and failings. It is only by caring for our soul that we grow into our calling and cultivate courage and humility.

Inspiring and empowering others (chapter 6):
Leadership is not just about an individual. It is about the relationship between the leader and other people. If we lead ourselves well, then we are a role model for others to follow. If we believe in others, inspire them, coach them and love them, then they will be better able to live out their own callings and grow into the potential that God has placed within them.

Creating space for God's grace in organisations (chapter 7):
As well as inspiring individuals, leaders have the opportunity to set the tone and determine how the group or organisation works. As leaders, we can invite God's presence into the workplace through integrating regular spiritual practices (such as prayer) into day-to-day working life. We can also be explicit about creating space for discernment in decision-making.

At the end of each chapter, you will find some questions for reflection. You may find it worthwhile to take 20-30 minutes to ponder these questions and learn from your own responses. You could use the questions as a self-directed study guide. You might like to revisit them again after finishing the book – you answers may have changed. You might like to use them in your one-to-one conversations with your staff as part of their development process…

Time for reflection

- *In which situations do I take any sort of leadership role?*
- *What do these different groups expect from me as a leader?*
- *How do I juggle the different roles and demands?*
- *What excites me about my leadership?*
- *Where do I most feel the pain of leadership? What do I currently fear?*
- *What sort of leader do I want to be? What would I like to be remembered for in my leadership?*

2. Calling in leadership

'The greatest leaders have been sustained by a belief that they were in some ways instruments of destiny, that they tapped hidden resources of power, that they truly lived as they tried to live in harmony with some greater, more universal purpose or intention in the world.'
John Adair

As we have said, it is impossible to lead others without a clear sense of your own direction. To lead well requires us to know what we are called to do – finding out what we were created for. Yet, the word 'calling' is not popular in some circles today. Over the years, people have badly misused the word to lend spiritual legitimacy to all kinds of coercive and manipulative behaviour. For some people, 'calling' is now synonymous with the abuse of power. For others, it has been over-used and diluted to mean merely career progression or simply just doing what we feel like doing.

The word 'calling' needs reclaiming. In English, at least, nothing else quite conveys the external compulsion to act. The more commonly used word 'vision' gives a flavour of this, but even this is not quite as strong. The New International Version translation of Proverbs 29:18 uses the word 'revelation' instead of vision: 'Where there is no *revelation*, the people cast off restraint.' So it is not just about having your own vision: it is about having a revelation or calling from God. A calling is a vision from heaven. Jesus himself said, 'The Son can only do what he sees the Father doing… For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.'[7] To find our true calling, we must hear from God. So we need to listen.

Yet, especially when we think we have heard from God, we need to 'test the spirits'.[8] Too many times, we fail to make sure that what we think we have heard from God is not just our emotional reaction to a situation. We should test it out with people who know us well and who have spiritual insight.

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7 John 5:19-20
8 1 John 4:1

A calling is much more than just a personal desire for our church or organisation to grow or for us to be successful. We can limit God's use of us as leaders by our small and sometimes selfish dreams. A calling is finding out what God expects from our life, not what we expect from God. Once we have heard, then we need to be obedient to that 'vision from heaven'.[9]

This calling is not static. It evolves and develops over time. By the time we reach what we thought was our destination, God may have refined our calling and given us a new challenge. It is like reaching what we thought was the summit of a mountain, only to find there is another peak beyond. We may need to renew our sense of calling. Some Christian leaders may have started with a clear sense of God's calling, but as they have moved up the leadership ladder, their clarity of vision has dimmed. Their passion has cooled. They have only a very general sense of what God expects from them. They would not claim to hear a voice behind them saying 'This is my way, walk in it.'[10] If as leaders we no longer feel a clear calling, we need to listen to God again. When we do, God will reveal more of why we are here, as Hope's story below illustrates powerfully.

Discovering my calling

Listening to a child changed my life. In 2001, I was visiting my home back in Uganda trying to reconnect with where I was born. But I was not prepared for what I saw and heard. When I listened to Dennis's story, I knew I could not return to my old life. My life was changed by the children I met. They fed the empty place in my soul. Through that visit, God gave me a sense of destiny, a clear purpose for my life – to help the former child soldiers and their families rebuild their lives.

I am a Ugandan, but educated in the UK and living there comfortably during the 1990s. But there was something missing. I wanted to visit my 'village' in Uganda – the area I had grown up in. I had heard things were not well. So I decided to go back to Gulu in northern Uganda and find out what was happening.

As I travelled up, I experienced a multitude of mixed emotions seeing the beautiful landscape full of African wildlife and flora. But the roads were full

[9] Acts 26:19
[10] Isaiah 30: 21

of potholes. The heat beat down on our car – the air-conditioner had long given up. We were sweaty and our bodies stuck to the plastic car seats. I felt miserable, hungry and thirsty. As we approached Gulu, I became more and more fearful. We saw trucks that had been burnt down by the rebels. There was no sign of human activity – no houses and animals. I was scared because we did not know what lay ahead. We were told that the rebels were operating everywhere. The war was far from over. We were told to be very careful of land mines. Many children were still being abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

We eventually arrived at refugee camps for those internally displaced by the war. It was the rainy season. There was mud everywhere. The makeshift homes provided little shelter. Children cried from hunger and cold. Mothers were desperately looking for their lost children. Some had lost their whole family due to abductions, displacement and diseases. We visited friends and families who were now confined to living in the camps and waiting for hand-outs from the World Food Programme. They had never been forced to be so dependent before. They felt they had lost their dignity. I had left a land of plenty, but it had become a land of pain.

I met nine-year-old Dennis while visiting the World Vision rehabilitation centre. It was full of children who had been abducted but recently escaped captivity. They anxiously peeped out of their rooms to see the visitors, hoping to be reunited with their families. Their faces showed so much pain and hopelessness. We asked to talk to some of them and pray for them. Dennis's story broke my heart:

'I had just returned home from school with my older brother. My father asked me to take the pig to market to sell and buy us some food. As I went outside, I was surrounded by rebels. They grabbed me and took me to my parents' hut. They asked me to beat my mother. I couldn't do this. So they beat up my brother instead. They forced him to hit and hit my mother, but she did not die. Then they put my father, my mother and my baby sister back in our hut. They bolted the door shut from outside. We were panicking, pleading and pleading. Then they forced me to set the hut on fire. As my brother and I were tied up and led away, we heard the screams and my mother wailing…'

Here is a small child telling me his story with tears streaming down his face. He asked if there was a need for him to continue living. He wondered if God could ever forgive him for murdering his own parents. I could only cry with him. I did not stop crying for the best part of two weeks. I imagined my own son going through this pain. It broke my heart. It revealed to me God's calling.

Over the next few months, with support from friends, I made several trips back to Gulu to distribute food, clothing, salt and medicine to the people trapped by the senseless war. I continued listening to children and women. I saw the real courage of the people I talked to. This gave me the courage to go on. For me, it was an honour to work with them.

But I realised that these short trips were not enough. I decided we had to do more. There were still hundreds of children fleeing the LRA rebels. The Bible says, *'For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more'* (Luke 12:48). This stayed with me. I did not have any money, but I knew powerful people. So I talked to friends, government officials, NORAD consultants. This is how Childcare Development Organisation Uganda was born…

Ten years on, I truly know that we are making a difference. Many times it has been tough. On occasions, I have felt like giving up. But working together as a team, we are saving lives and also improving lives. I have learnt to really trust God to provide. After all, he will give us what we need to do the work to which he has called us.

Holy discontent

Calling is rarely a bolt from the blue. It is usually some time in the awakening. Bill Hybels puts it well: 'What is so powerful and so incendiary that it gives birth to vision? A firestorm so incendiary that it forces them into leadership, to give birth to a vision they can act on' (Global Leadership Summit, Willow Creek, 2010). He calls it 'holy discontent'. For Moses, this was perhaps seeing his fellow Egyptians being abused and beaten as slaves by their Egyptian masters.[11] Some years later, when Moses was faced with the burning bush, this holy discontent turned into a clear calling.

Hope's story above is full of holy discontent. Hope had a pre-awareness, an inkling that something was not right. Then, her visit woke her up to a reality that so upset and angered her that she could not walk away. Although the prospect was painful, she realised that her heart was longing for something more from life. Most leaders are not content with the current situation. Dan Allender writes, 'A leader who is OK with the *status quo* will not lead anywhere. A leader must be troubled and discontented' (Allender, 2006, page 58). There is a prophetic element to great leadership – seeing things as they should be, not as they are.

[11] Exodus 2:11

A calling does not come from a void. It comes from our hearts being touched, outraged even, by what we see in the reality around us. Anger, pain and frustration can create the conditions for God to call us. God works with our emotions. He needs to ignite our passions. In the Bible, we read about Daniel who was overcome with anguish, or Nehemiah who cried for three days. God chooses us for a task because of the passions of our heart. Burden and calling are two sides of the same coin. As Bill Hybels points out, 'There is a huge difference between a professional leader and someone whose heart has been wrecked by holy discontent and who acts in order to relieve it…' When we find our place of holy discontent, we should probably spend more time there and feed it, uncomfortable though it may be. We should stay there because the pain we feel resonates with God's heart in that situation.

Emerging from our identity

> *'The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.'*
> Frederick Buechner

Very often, God speaks through an inner voice. He calls us to become our true self, the person we were created to be. Calling may be about 'doing', but first and foremost it is about 'being'. In the Hasidic tale, Rabbi Zusya says, 'In the coming world, they will not ask me, "Why were you not Moses?" They will ask me: "Why were you not Zusya?"' Calling is about finding out who you were truly meant to be and what you were meant to do. It is about being who we are and at the same time becoming more than we can yet envision.

Our calling is based on our character. It is inextricably interwoven with our human situation and our personal history. This includes (but is not limited to) the peculiarities of our life, our heritage, our personality, our foibles, our passions and deepest orientation. It may be about our weaknesses and limits as well as our strengths. Finding our calling is about listening to our life and understanding what we are truly about. It is about hearing from God about the unique contribution we make to the world – doing what only we can do. Max De Pree says, 'A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.' Finding my calling is finding out the song I have been given to sing.

We may be tempted to follow other people's callings for us, trying to live up to their expectations of us. These may be parents, family, colleagues or role models. We may be imitating our heroes instead of listening to our hearts (Palmer, 2000). We need insight into our own limitations and potential so that our own ego or ethics do not lead us into a place that is not for us. It is dangerous when we find ourselves doing things we feel we 'ought' to do, rather than things that really excite us. To inspire others through our leadership, we have to be truly passionate ourselves. If we try and live a calling, however noble, that has nothing to do with who we really are, we can only fake it for a while. Eventually, if we are wearing someone else's mask, we will suffer the consequences and those around us will pay the price.

As Hope's story illustrates, finding our calling is about being who we are and also doing what we have to do. Hope found it impossible to walk away from that situation in Uganda and still be true to who she was. However much part of her wanted to return to her more comfortable old life in England, she felt this was no longer an option. Calling is something so strong that, if we were to ignore it or refuse it, it would jeopardise our well-being. It is something 'we cannot not do'. Like Jonah, who tried to escape his calling, we might end up in the equivalent of the stomach of a whale.

Hope's story also shows us that an authentic calling from God is never self-centred. It is about serving others and bringing God's kingdom on earth. 'True vocation joins self and service' (Palmer, 2000, page 16) – 'the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need', as Buechner put it. But calling starts, not with the bottomless pit of need in the world, but with your nature, what brings you the deep joy of knowing that this is what gives you energy and meaning.

Recognising calling

'Any kind of authentic calling usually takes us to a place where we have serious objections of some sort, to places where we feel inadequate. One of the ways we recognise calling is that it has come about in ways that could not be humanly orchestrated and so cannot easily be dismissed…'
Ruth Haley Barton

A genuine calling is not something we can do in our own strength. It requires us to step out in faith and depend on God. It requires our faith in God's power to bring change, not simply our own talents. This takes us far out of our comfort zone. In the Bible, Peter had to step out of the boat in order to walk on water. One way to recognise calling is that if we think we can fulfil our calling on our own, if we are not frightened, then it is probably not from God. To respond to our calling requires courage, as the next chapter will explore.

This reveals another paradox inherent in leadership. In essence, God is saying: It is all about you (because you are the one I have called) but at the same time it is not about you at all (because it is all about me and my work in and through you).

So, perhaps rather surprisingly, our calling may be as much about our weaknesses as our strengths. Our strengths may indeed help us with certain tasks and opportunities but, where we think we can do it ourselves, we tend to leave God out. It is when we realise we are weak that we really depend on God. This may be why God's 'power is made perfect in weakness'.[12] It is our frailty and even our sin that point to the gospel of grace.

Persevering in calling

> *'Life yields only to the conqueror. Never accept what can be gained by giving in. Life only demands from you the strength you possess. Only one feat is possible – not to have run away.'*
> Dag Hammarskjöld

Following your calling is not for the faint-hearted. It always requires perseverance. Our calling rarely fits our time-scale. Walking the path of our calling is more like a pilgrimage than a package tour. It usually takes more time to fulfil than we expect. It may take us to dark places. In a pilgrimage, hardships are not accidental but integral to the journey itself. Apparent failure and disaster can strip the ego of the illusion that is in charge and allow space for the true self to emerge (Palmer, 2000).

Leaders are not mythological creatures born with a magical quality that smooths their path to success. No, they are people like you and me.

[12] 2 Corinthians 12:9

But they do have determination and persistence to face the inevitable setbacks along the way. The great Christian leader, William Wilberforce, campaigned resolutely in parliament for 26 years before the Slave Trade Act was passed in England in 1807. Even then, the slave trade was only finally abolished completely in 1833, just three days before Wilberforce died.

On a more mundane level, the ubiquitous WD-40 lubricant got its name because the first 39 experiments leading up to its creation failed. WD-40 literally stands for 'Water Displacement – 40th attempt'. There is no smooth journey straight to the promised land. We always have to pass through the wilderness. Persistence and determination have always been primary ingredients in achieving anything of lasting value, as Jacob's story clearly shows.

A call to learning

School was always a big thing for me. But it was always a struggle. When I started in Class One at the age of eight, there were only three teachers for 250 children. Finances were tight. I remember cutting my 32 page exercise book into two as we did not have money for the two books needed. Almost all my friends dropped out. Of the 54 who started in my year, only four finished primary school. None were girls. I remember in Class Four when 14 of my girl classmates were taken out of school and forced into early marriage.

But I was passionate about learning. I was always in the top three positions in class throughout my primary school. In the leaving exams, I came top of the class, gaining a place at secondary school. At that stage, I assumed I would become a teacher, as teachers and doctors were the only educated people we knew (and the pain of getting an injection had put me off medicine!)

But I found secondary school more of a challenge. The school had no learning facilities and was badly understaffed. My ex-classmates were enjoying our tribal life of the Maasai. They tried to convince me to leave my studies. My father was also discouraged by rumours that there are no jobs in Kenya – not unless one has a godfather in high office to assist in finding jobs. He was really unhappy having to sell his cattle to pay for my schooling. He also tried to persuade me to drop out of school. But I resisted. When he saw that I was not paying attention to his request, he stopped paying my school fees so that they would throw me out. I was really sad as I was doing well in class. I had become a Christian and had started a Christian Union. I was also athletics champion. I felt so frustrated.

I spoke to one of the village elders, a close friend of my father, asking him to plead my case. He succeeded and I was able to continue with my studies. These bitter challenges made me change my career. I became committed to helping my community come out of their cocoons of traditional culture and rise to the challenges of development.

In 2002, I graduated from secondary school with good enough grades to go to university. But my father was set against it. Even when he saw my results were good, he asked me to go and look for a job so that I pay him back his cows that were sold for my education. I said I needed more than a Form Four certificate. Education was such a burden inside my heart. But what could I do?

Again, my father only relented when my pastor and the church elders intervened. But he disinherited me, saying: 'Remember this, all the inheritance that I was supposed to give you as my son has gone on your education. So never come back and claim anything from me.' To be so ostracised in my culture was devastating. Yet, I continued. I completed a diploma in community development in two years with amazing support from one of my lecturers, who paid half of my college fees himself. No one from home bothered to come for my graduation ceremony.

I was still committed to helping my community address the escalating challenges they were facing. So I went back home. I knew I had to help them solve their own problems, rather than come in with solutions from outside. First, they had to acknowledge the worsening problems they were facing and also realise that they have all the potential and resources required to address them.

I called a community meeting. I asked them about their needs and concerns. I got them to list the problems and rank them by how serious they were. They prioritised lack of schools as the number one issue, as this was leaving the community illiterate and unable to address the other challenges. There was only one primary school in the whole area with some children having to walk 14 kilometres to and from school every day.

In the meeting, they realised that if they were going to do anything about this, they had to do it themselves. As one person said, 'We have water. We have hard stones. We have sand. We have the resources we need to build a school ourselves.' All community members also contributed a goat towards construction of the classrooms. We delegated responsibilities and made timelines for action. While the school was being built, I volunteered to start teaching the children under a tree.

Amazingly, it worked out as planned. Within a year, we founded Olkatetemai Primary School with three classrooms finished. Two teachers were paid by parents to assist me in running the school, though things were still tough financially. By God's grace, our school soon ranked the best compared to the neighbouring schools. We quickly got a good reputation and more pupils arrived.

We managed to persuade World Vision Kenya to construct three more classrooms. We applied for registration through the Ministry of Education, which was approved within a year. Becoming a government school meant we got three government teachers posted to us. This enabled me to return to my own development profession. Today, the school is running smoothly with seven teachers, eight classrooms, a staffroom and teachers' cottages.

During the drought of 2005–2007, my father's entire herd of livestock died. He came to me and thanked me for convincing him to educate me when the cattle were still there. He declared that he will be supporting me in any way that I need him. He advised my younger brothers to follow my steps. I have also helped my brothers and sister to pursue their studies and two of them are now working, one as a teacher and the other as an accountant.

Without a clear sense of calling, it is hard to summon up the determination needed to persevere. But as Dag Hammarskjöld encourages us, 'When the morning's freshness has been replaced by the weariness of midday, when leg muscles quiver under the strain, the climb seems endless and, suddenly, nothing will go quite as you wish… it is then that you must not hesitate.' (1966) Following our calling requires courage, as we shall see in the next chapter and in this powerful story of leadership that Jane Lanoi shares.

Against all odds

At the age of seven, a young boy and his family were forced out of their home. The boy had to work to support his family. When he was nine, his mother passed away. When he grew up, the young man was keen to go to law school, but had no education.

At 22, he lost his job as a store clerk. At 23, he ran for state legislature and lost. The same year, he went into business. It failed, leaving him with a debt that took him 17 years to repay. At 27, he had a nervous breakdown.

Two years later, he tried for the post of speaker in his state legislature. He lost. At 31, he was defeated in his attempt to become an elector. By 35, he had been defeated twice while running for Congress. Finally, he did manage to secure a brief term in Congress, but at 39 he lost his re-election bid.

At 41, his four-year-old son died. At 42, he was rejected as a prospective land officer. At 45, he ran for the Senate and lost. Two years later, he lost the vice presidential nomination. At 49, he ran for Senate and lost again.

At 51, he was elected the President of the United States of America. The man in question: Abraham Lincoln.

The fruit of calling

A clear calling is an essential element of leadership because it also helps us set boundaries on what we do. A clear calling helps us focus. So many Christian leaders are pulled simultaneously in many different directions. We become overwhelmed by other people's demands. We get exhausted and in some cases burnt out. In churches in particular, there is so much 'good work' to do that we assume that everything is 'God's work'. When everything appears good, it is so hard to say 'no'. Having a clear sense of calling helps us avoid trying to respond to every issue. It helps us prioritise and choose between the different demands on us. A sense of calling can help us decide which job opportunities we go for or take on. Why should every offer of promotion (even in church) be the right way for us to go?

Having a clear sense of God's calling also helps us see things beyond our current circumstances – hopefully from God's perspective. In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul was so sure of his calling that he allowed himself to be taken to Rome 'disguised as a prisoner'. This is even more important in times of uncertainty when the future is by no means clear.

Finally, because our calling is always beyond our individual ability, it reminds us we have to work with others to achieve it. Inspiring others needs leadership – especially when we have to take people with us into unchartered waters or an uncertain future. A clear sense of calling gives us a route map which others can follow, as we explore further in Chapter 6.

Time for reflection

At the Competence Sharing Network Project's leadership workshop, we each spent 30 minutes alone with God, listening to him about our calling. When one of the participants came back to the group, she said, 'I can go home now. I have got what I came here for.'

Spend just 30 minutes asking God to speak to you about the following:

- *What is the unique contribution that I have been placed on earth to make?*
- *What is the song I have been given to sing?*
- *What is God saying to me today about my calling?*
- *What am I learning about my calling?*
- *What is the next step forward?*

3. Courage in leadership

Every one of the leadership stories so far has described both the challenges of leadership as well as the central role of calling. But each one of them also underlines the importance of courage. Leaders need courage to create something where nothing previously existed, to dare to change the *status quo* and to overcome people's natural fears, including our own.

Leadership rarely feels like a stroll in the park or skipping through a lush meadow. More often, it feels like climbing an impossible mountain laden with baggage or plodding through dark valleys with no clear destination in sight. As leaders, we face considerable obstacles in seeking to bring God's kingdom through our organisations. We are afraid of what might go wrong. This is entirely normal for any human being. The question is what we do with our fears. Do we let them control us or do we summon up the courage to overcome them?

Too easily, we can let our fears direct the way we respond to people and situations. As the management researcher Dorothy Marcic says, 'Fear is one of the greatest diseases of mankind and it is rampant in organisations and group decision-making processes' (Marcic, 1997). Or as Dan Allender warns, 'The more a leader lets fear be his driving force, the emptier his heart becomes and the more suspicious s/he is of those with whom he works. Fear creates a growing emptiness in the leader' (Allender, 2006, page 42). No wonder the Bible urges us so often 'do not fear' or 'don't be afraid' – 365 times according to some counts.

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the will to overcome it. The Bible is full of stories of leaders like Moses, Gideon or Nehemiah who have had to overcome their fears. Esther feared for her life by going to the king, but summoned up her courage to run the risk. Even Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane sweated blood as he asked God to take away the cup of suffering.[13] It took remarkable courage to choose to face crucifixion. True leadership acknowledges fear but also overcomes it.

[13] Luke 22:42

Being decisive

> *'Leadership is the risk of deciding when the alternatives are equal. It does not require leadership to choose when one choice is obviously better. Leadership is the risk of choosing when every choice might be right or wrong.'*
> Max De Pree

As leaders, we rarely have to make simple decisions where it is obvious which way to go. Leaders have to make hard decisions, when the future outcome is uncertain. We continually have to take steps of faith. Poor leaders put off making decisions until it is too late. They prevaricate and this delay damages the organisation they are meant to be leading. As John Adair points out, 'It is always better to take change by the hand and lead it where you want it to go before it takes you by the throat and drags you off in any direction' (Adair, 2002:233).

I remember one church-based NGO in Malawi that encountered founder leadership issues common to many such organisations. The director had begun to cut corners, there were allegations of corruption and the staff had lost all trust in the leader. But rather than take the necessary action, the church leader and chair of trustees delayed and delayed, citing the virtue of loyalty. Meanwhile, the good staff all gradually left and, one by one, donors reluctantly pulled out. It took 18 months for the trustees to take the necessary action finally and remove the director, by which time the NGO was barely alive.

The root of the word 'decide' is 'to cut off'. De-cide is closely related to other words like homi-cide, sui-cide, patri-cide, infanti-cide and geno-cide. To decide on something requires putting to death other options. Sometimes as leader you will effectively be axing jobs. Making such decisions is particularly challenging for Christian leaders. They are concerned about their staff – and rightly so. But sometimes, in focusing too much on the staff, they are actually disloyal to the mission itself. Misguided loyalty to staff diverts them from necessary hard decisions. Torild's story below shows what can happen when a leader summons up courage to take really tough decisions.

Tears of joy in firing a friend – Torild's story

Anna was my deputy. She had become my friend. But in one of the most distressing meetings of my leadership life, I had to tell her that she was not performing as I needed her to. For the good of the mission of the organisation, she had to move on…

It all started when I became Director of Social Welfare in one of Oslo's suburbs. I was deeply disturbed by the situation I found in the office. There had been a huge overspend, leaving a large budget deficit. Clients were dissatisfied as they had to wait long periods for their benefits and had little contact with their caseworkers. Many employees were on sick leave. Those that remained had lost motivation for the work. I was faced by an incredibly difficult task. I had to lead a fundamental change process to turn things around. But the possibilities also excited me. I had faith it could be so much better.

I knew full well that this change was not just about me as a leader. The key was to get my team re-motivated and pulling together in the right strategic directions. The staff had to be involved, feel included and take an active role in the process. They were the only asset we had. To make this happen, I created a leadership team with the heads of different sections and also my deputy, Anna, the Assistant Director.

Anna had worked for many, many years in that office. She had a strong education background and considerable practical experience. When I arrived, she made me feel really welcome and was very supportive of me as an individual. We became friends. The problem was that she was sucked energy and hope from me and from the team.

She had applied for my job as director, but had been turned down. She had been there so long and was demoralised. She was critical and negative to all suggestions. Whenever we talked about improving things, all she could say was, 'We tried that before and it did not work.' At a time when we needed inspiration and uplift, she dragged us all down. Probably without meaning to, she spread a sense of hopelessness in the office. Our staff was increasingly frustrated with her and came to me to complain.

I wrestled with this and prayed about what to do. In our society, it is incredibly hard to dismiss someone from a government post. Just to make it feasible you have to help them find another post. I discussed it with my superior and she agreed I should speak to Anna. I was terrified of what might happen. I could not sleep at all that night. But I knew in my heart and my head what I had to do.

I called her in the very next day. I told her that I had to share something very difficult with her. I said, 'You have not been giving me the support I need for the tough task ahead. I have tried and hoped it would work. But I know I cannot continue to have you as my deputy anymore.' I told her that I appreciate her very much as a person (I really did and still do!) and a professional social worker - but not as a leader.

I was stunned by what happened next. Almost immediately, she fell down on her knees right in front of me. Tears streamed down her cheeks and she stuttered: 'Thank you, Torild. This is what I needed to hear. I feel like a stone has fallen from my heart. I have felt this burden was so heavy and difficult for me.' It was one of those grace-filled moments. We hugged each other and agreed that this was the only right decision. She explained that what she really wanted to do was work as a special consultant for our drug abuse program.

Anna was able to stay in the office and we worked together for another seven years, remaining close. Anna is now one of the most recognised specialists in her field of work. I was able to employ a brilliant and capable woman in her place. She worked out incredibly well. The department was able to turn round because I had the courage to fire a friend. This tough decision released Anna into her true calling.

Jim Collins's ground-breaking research on the most successful organisations over the past 50 years found that one of the most crucial elements to success is getting the wrong people off the bus (and the right people on board and in the right places) (Collins, 2005). Christian organisations and churches are notoriously bad at getting the wrong people off the bus. We mistakenly believe that people who are unable to perform can only be redeemed by keeping them. Torild's story (above) proves that this is not necessarily true. By focusing on the individual, rather than the mission, we can lose our way.

In time, every good leader will disappoint everyone. Leadership requires of us an acceptance that we will not be liked. Leadership is not a popularity contest. What are we more committed to – the Kingdom of God or people's opinions of us? The primary responsibility of the leader should be to the mission, not to the staff. If we look to please the people, as Pontius Pilate did,[14] we can end up going in the wrong direction.

[14] Mark 15:15

We need courage to get the right people on board. But this does not mean that we surround ourselves just with people we like, with people who just tell us what we want to hear. We need people who are deeply committed to the good of the organisation, not to pleasing us.

Unleashing creativity

> *'The essential part of creativity is not being afraid to fail.'*
> Edwin H. Land

Leadership is a creative act – bringing into being something that did not exist or taking an organisation or group into unchartered waters. Leadership is about co-creating something with God. Recent studies by IBM (2010) have concluded that, in today's fast-moving environment, creativity is the most important quality for success in leadership. Creativity is closely related not just to calling but also to humility, patience and above all courage.

It takes humility to see a situation and accept 'I don't know the answer' – to allow your imagination to wander and see what new ideas emerge. Creativity requires going beyond conventional wisdom and looking at things in a fresh way. To a large degree, we all have the potential to be creative. Everyone has ideas. But what is often lacking is the courage to see it through, taking the idea from concept to implementation (innovation). Yet, courage is essential if leadership is to be creative. As Warren Bennis says:

> 'Innovation – any new idea – by definition will not be accepted at first. It takes repeated attempts, endless demonstrations, monotonous rehearsals before innovation can be accepted and internalized by an organization. This requires *courageous patience.*' [15]

It is not just the leader's ideas that are important. In fact, the experience of companies such as Google has shown that the most successful ideas came from the rank and file, ideas which had not even had the leadership's backing initially. [16] Leadership does not have to produce all the new ideas – but rather develop a culture where creativity is encouraged, risk is rewarded and failures are learnt from.

[15] www.leadershipnow.com/creativityquotes.html
[16] http://hbr.org/2008/10/creativity-and-the-role-of-the-leader/ar/1

Dialogue in crisis

'A leader can enter chaos and call forth the best in others rather than using chaos as a cue for blame and isolation.'
Dan Allender

'Every crisis has the effect of revealing something about the leader's character and inner life' (Allender, 2006, page 71). Leadership becomes more visible in a crisis. Emotions are heightened and people look closely at how their leaders respond. There is a big temptation to react in a knee-jerk fashion. But good leadership in a crisis is not always about immediate and unilateral action. It is more often about taking an even bigger risk – inviting dialogue. It may involve creating a context for difficult, but important conversations, as Stella's story below shows.

Courage in crisis – Stella's story

I had just been promoted to the position of deputy school head in a new school. It turned out that my head and supervisor was a difficult man. He was highly critical of everything I did and condescendingly made this all too clear. My work and contributions were never accepted or appreciated. The school head believed, since he had been long in the service, he knew everything and I was to take his directives without question. But I needed his support and guidance in my new leadership role, looking after over 60 staff and 600 students. I never got it. He was highly autocratic and feared by staff and students alike. In one sense, his methods appeared to work. Teachers and students were coerced, controlled, directed and threatened, and his work got done. We all worked hard because we did not want to displease the head.

One day, something extraordinary happened to change our relationship and his way of working. One evening, I was so exhausted I went to bed early. I was woken up by loud shouts of rowdy boys near the hostels area. I walked over to find out what the uproar was about. I found an angry mob of more than 100 students. When I asked what it was about, they shouted out at me and told me they were not going to turn up for school the following day. They shouted they were fed up of the current administration and the decisions it made. I tried to go near and try to talk to them, but they threatened they would throw rocks at me and beat me up. I was terrified. I had no idea what to do. I thought that, if I walked away, they might riot and destroy everything

they could find. I also knew that standing there and not reaching any form of resolution with them would yield equally destructive results.

I started praying. I could do nothing else. I can't remember what exactly I prayed for, but I prayed passionately. Then I spoke to them again. I acknowledged that they had problems and that they were also seeking solutions to those problems. I suggested we look at these problems, discuss them and begin to seek solutions. I don't know what happened. Out of nowhere – maybe more correctly it was divine providence - they agreed to a discussion, but not with me. They said, because there was a bigger force in the school, they wanted the school head to come and talk with them immediately.

They assured me they would wait, so I went to look for the school head. I found him at his house. He refused to come with me, afraid that the students would beat him up. Suddenly, he was not looking like the tyrant of the school we all knew. He was scared. Eventually, I managed to convince him that we should listen to the students. We talked and together we planned a strategy. He was still afraid of addressing all the students at once, so we came up with a plan to ask students to go to specific classes and we talk to them there. At first, the students resisted this, then they agreed. It was a long night but we worked together.

Afterwards, things improved dramatically. The issues with the students were successfully resolved and the school moved forward. The head changed in a remarkable way. After that night, he started respecting me, listening to me and supporting me. He realised he needed my support in his work. Before, it had been hard for him to accept other people's opinions. Now, we started to have scheduled staff meetings and a student representative council where consultation and transparency were key factors.

I was so tempted to gloat that the dictator had been dealt with – maybe initially I did a little. But I soon experienced the humility of finding my prayers had been answered. The Lord had used an unusual way to change my supervisor. I was humbled by the way the Lord took care of this. This showed me I can rely on the Lord in all the areas of life, including my leadership. I could so easily have fought this dictator and the results would have been disastrous. But, because I committed the problem to the Lord, he gave us better solutions.

Facing pain

'Nothing is more difficult than leading. Nothing else compares to the hardship of firing a friend or telling people that their work was necessary for a season, but their employment has now reached an end'
Dan Allender

Taking hard decisions does not always have a positive outcome as in Torild's story above. Sometimes, leadership means having the courage to make tough choices and simply sit with the pain – accepting we cannot fix it. Festus's powerful story below shows how much we need unflinching courage in these situations and why we genuinely suffer with the people affected by our decisions.

Not flinching from pain – Festus's story

I know God never gives leaders an easy task, but I had no idea how hard it would be to make people redundant. These were my friends and colleagues, not just budget lines. I would have done almost anything to avoid this step, but sometimes leaders have to implement tough decisions. This took more courage than I ever imagined.

It had been clear for some time that our programme needed to significantly change. Our work with street children had been developed by missionaries many years earlier. The approach was comprehensive in meeting their welfare needs, but clearly not sustainable, nor empowering. The main institutional funder had been talking about greater sustainability for some years and had indicated future funding for such welfare programmes was not going to be forthcoming. We knew we had to take radical measures.

The original missionaries who had founded the programme were now back in Europe but, when they heard, they were adamant that such change must be resisted. I remember a call I got from one of them. It was terrible. It lasted a whole hour. He was so angry that I contemplated resigning. I said to him: 'You either have to finance the whole budget or let us change things to fit the resources we have.' When I put the phone down, I thought, 'If I have to resign or get chased out, then so be it.'

But we also knew that if we changed the shape of the programme significantly, then some staff would have to be made redundant. These were

people whom we had worked with for many years, people we had prayed with, laughed with and had fun together with…

So we put it off and put it off. At least, we did start to do some 'personal development seminars' for the staff. This covered issues like savings and starting small businesses. We were trying to get people to contemplate and prepare for life outside the NGO. But nothing could really prepare them, or even me, for the actual shock of dismissing people.

When, as expected, future funding did not come through, we knew what we had to do. I remember clearly that Friday in 2009 when our steering committee took the awful decision that we simply could not go on any more. There was no option but to strike off certain areas. We had to get rid of nine staff out of 17 and reintegrate almost 40 street children without having completed their rehabilitation process. There was no further funding for salaries, feeding and other personal requirements at the centre. We had to reduce salaries of the remaining staff by 50 per cent. These were my friends. I had to inform them on the following Monday of this terrible but necessary decision. I felt the lowest I have ever been – emotionally, spiritually and physically. Hundreds of thoughts and wishes flipped through my mind but I knew nothing could change things.

When I went home that night, it was too heavy for me. My heart and my mind and my body were not there. I was so upset that I bitterly told my wife to leave me alone. I sat slumped in a chair until 1am, feeling hopeless, helpless and tears rolling down from my eyes... I was grieving for the people I knew so well. I was thinking of one lady with her seven children, no husband, no education certificate… What sort of a life was I condemning her to?

The whole of the Saturday and Sunday I sat alone. Eventually, I went for a long walk in the forest. I thumped my palm so hard that it hurt. I felt completely bereft and alone. I tried to pray and pray. I cried out to God. It was a really 'dark night of my soul'.

On the Monday morning, I went into the office and pretended I was strong. I called for a staff meeting where I made the announcement. I told them the departments which would be affected and the people involved. I said there was nothing we could do but accept them. There was total silence for five minutes. It felt like hours. The rest of the day, I spent listening and talking to each individual affected. It took more than two hours with each staff member. I had to give them opportunity to vent their pain by weeping, airing

their fears, their challenges, and asking what they might do. These individual sessions were traumatising for me. I felt so unworthy that I could not even sit in my usual office seat. The mood in the centre was very sombre for days.

Writing those dismissal letters was the most difficult thing I have ever had to do. Tears rolled down my cheeks again as I gave these termination letters to my esteemed, hardworking and faithful employees. It was excruciatingly painful, but it had to be done. It took all my courage and more, simply not to run away.

I knew leadership takes courage. I learnt that day that it is not always a heroic, crusading courage. Sometimes, courage is just about accepting pain and not flinching.

None of us became leaders in order to suffer. But having the courage to suffer is a key leadership virtue. We cannot do this in our own strength. We need to look for God's help. As the psalmist writes, 'When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds and be silent… Put your trust in the Lord.' [17]

The fruit of courage

Courage enables us to overcome our inherent fears. It gives us the ability to act when the future is unclear, when the best way forward is not obvious. It enables us to bear the burden of having ultimate responsibility for the direction of our organisation. It takes courage to prioritise.

Courage also gives us the strength to take painful yet necessary decisions. So often we wish that difficult situations would just go away: that people would start performing adequately; that they would behave honestly and with commitment; that conflicts would resolve themselves without our intervention. Taking tough decisions is the core of leadership. Courage helps us take these decisions before it is too late – before the people and the organisation are badly damaged.

Courage is an essential part of ensuring that we respond creatively to new challenges. It takes courage to do new things in a different way. It means we have to accept failure as a positive learning experience and reward risk.

[17] Psalm 4:4–5

Courage is not about pretending we have no fears or hiding our pain in difficult decisions. It is takes greater courage to be open and vulnerable (in an appropriate way). People respect us when we are honest and authentic. They realise we are human and can see the courage it takes to lead at such times. They can see humility – a critical leadership asset as we go on to explore in the next chapter.

Time for reflection

- *Where is God calling me to be courageous in my leadership at the moment? What do I fear?*
- *When was the last time I really stepped out of the boat? What happened?*
- *What do I fear at the moment in my leadership?*
- *How much am I concerned with people's good opinion of me?*
- *How do I behave in a crisis? Do I invite dialogue or look to see who is at fault?*
- *How do I react to pain which I cannot fix?*

4. Humility in leadership

Courage coupled with humility is an incredibly powerful combination in leadership. Jim Collins in *Good to Great* talks about the ultimate 'Level Five Leadership' which he describes as a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. From his research into the top 11 companies since 1965, he discovered they each had great leaders who were far from the expected 'larger than life' norm. Instead, he found leaders who were both shy and fearless, leaders with a compelling modesty yet a driving ambition for the cause.

While calling and courage are necessary, humility is also vital to keep them in check. As Dan Allender says, 'True confidence is courage that has been humbled' (Allender, 2006, page 74). Calling and courage can so easily lead us into the temptation of pride – the original sin. We know that 'the heart is deceitful above all things'.[18]

While pride may be less visible than falling into the trap of lust or greed, it can be very destructive for leaders and therefore for organisations. Humility is the only antidote for pride.

Pride – the greatest temptation?

Pride is arguably the biggest temptation for any leader. So often, we see leaders change when they are given the power of leadership. Power really does corrupt and absolute power really does corrupt absolutely. Pride in leaders is nothing new. Two thousand years ago, the Romans recognised the dangerous and destructive power of pride. When their generals were being carried on chariots in triumphal procession, with crowds waving palm fronds, they had a slave constantly shouting in their ear, 'Remember you are only human' (Carr *et al*, 1998).

We have seen the dangers associated with pride in spectacular ways with political leaders – as these extreme statements from presidents show. And sadly some of them may resonate a little with our experience of church leadership.

[18] Jeremiah 17:9

'There is no number two, three or four. In Côte d'Ivoire there is only a number one: that's me and I don't share my decisions.'
President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire

'I would like ministers, assistant ministers and others to sing like a parrot after me. That is how we can progress.'
President Daniel arap Moi, Kenya

'*The chief is the chief. He is the eagle who flies high and cannot be touched by the spit of toads.*'
President Mobutu Sese Seko, DR Congo

'I want to be blunt. As long as I am here and you say I must be your President, you have to do what I want, what I like, and not what you like and you want. Your Kamuzu is in charge. That is my way.'
President Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi

We know from experience, as well as from the Bible,[19] that pride inevitably leads to a fall. Management research amongst the top 500 companies in the USA found that pride was the main cause of business failure. Pride in leaders is so damaging because it leads to impatience, an unwillingness to build consensus, an inability to receive criticism and an unwillingness to endure periods of trial and uncertainty (Delbecq, 1999, page 348). Sadly, the temptation of pride seems to grow stronger the higher we climb in leadership and the busier we become.

Outward success can often lead us to ignore our inner lives. As Parker Palmer then warns:

'Thus we become dangerous, for our power grows even as our consciousness dims. We become increasingly blind and small and we visit our projections onto the world around us. The very factors that propel us into leadership precipitate our downfall and promote pain and discomfort in those we lead. (Quoted by Kaplan, 2002, page 195)

This tendency to become blinded by pride is often exacerbated by followers, who may become increasingly reluctant to give us honest feedback. We may no longer hear how we are really doing. Instead, we are the object

[19] Proverbs 16:18

of deference and flattery. This is why self-deception is one of the most important challenges that Christian leaders face. Leaders are placed on pedestals. We are told we are irreplaceable. It is all too easy to start believing these myths about ourselves. As with King David in the Bible, we then start to go astray.

Such pride leads to an exaggerated sense of personal responsibility. Palmer describes it as 'functional atheism, the belief that ultimate responsibility for anything rests with us. This shadow causes pathology on every level in our lives. It leads us to impose our will on others, stressing our relationships, sometimes to the point of breaking. It results in burn-out, depression and despair as we learn the world does not bend to our will' (Palmer, 2000, page 88). When we think everything depends on us, we take too much on ourselves. We then become too controlling, misusing spiritual power and being overly zealous for doing God's work (Blakeley and Howard, 2010). Our verbal prayer may be 'Thy will be done', but our actions shout 'My will be done'. Pride can also make us think that we are entitled to special treatment, to status, that the normal rules do not apply to us.

Pride is a perverted form of worship. It puts self at the centre of things, instead of God. It basks in its own glory. It closes us off from change. We blame someone or something else for a problem. No wonder the Bible says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'[20]

The Bible clearly shows how pride affects even the best leaders. Moses was described as 'a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth'.[21] Yet, he failed to enter the promised land. His pride made him strike the rock to make it yield water, rather than speaking to it, as God had instructed. Jesus also identified pride as the major temptation for religious leaders of his day:

> 'Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called "Doctor" and "Reverend".

[20] 1 Peter 5:5
[21] Numbers 12:3

> 'Don't let people do that to you, put you on a pedestal like that. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. Don't set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let him tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of "Father"; you have only one Father, and he's in heaven. And don't let people manoeuvre you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them – Christ.
>
> 'Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant.'[22]

Humility – the divine antidote

If pride is the greatest temptation for leaders, then humility is the only antidote. But what is humility? As John Ruskin said:

> 'I believe that the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I do not mean by humility a doubt in his own power or hesitation in speaking opinions… All great men not only know their business, but usually know that they know it… but they have a curious sense of powerlessness, feeling that the greatness is not in them, but through them; that they could not do or be anything else than God made them.'

Humility is not a falsehood or a lie. It is not about pretending that we are not gifted. Authentic humility actually appreciates the gifts we have been given. It is an honest assessment of strengths, not just weaknesses. Humility acknowledges our gifts, but not with pride, instead with amazement and awe.

The critical issue is that humble people know that 'greatness is not in them, but through them', as Ruskin says. They know who is in charge, who gave them those talents and who can take them away at any point. In theory, then, as Christians we should be better able to resist pride and be more humble. But it needs us to really know in our hearts our true identity in Christ. As the Bible puts it:

[22] Matthew 23:1–12 (The Message)

'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!'[23]

This is not to say that all humble people are good leaders - or even that all good leaders are necessarily humble. But it does seem that truly *great* leaders are humble. Through genuine humility, great leaders are able to draw out the best in others and use their own strengths appropriately.

The gift of failure

'To experience brokenness and humility, all you have to do is to lead. To fail is leadership is to stand face-to-face with the deepest and truest reality of life: We were never meant to have God's power. We are not God.'
Dan Allender

Failure is the best way to learn humility. For many of us, the path to humility leads us through humiliation, when we are brought low, rendered powerless, stripped of pretences and defences, and left feeling fraudulent, empty and useless (Palmer, 2000). Festus's story below illustrates this powerfully.

Facing failure – Festus's story

I have been in leadership for many years, but I have always feared failure most of all. This made me highly sensitive to any criticism. Each day I wanted everything to be working so well that I only ever received positive feedback.

[23] Philippians 2:3–8

In late-2011, the inevitable happened. I had to face the harsh reality of failure as a leader. It was so humbling that I almost gave up. On the face of it, things appeared to be going so well. In our peace and reconciliation programme work, we were breaking new ground. The community, the church, members of staff were all highly satisfied. Their praise, confidence and trust blinded us from continuously examining ourselves in all areas. Without knowing it, we had become complacent.

Donors undertook an organisational assessment of our management procedures and policies. It brought to light major weaknesses. It rated us zero in the most sensitive area of financial management. The conclusions were so disheartening that I saw total darkness in my leadership. We were informed that the preliminary findings showed that our books of accounts were the worst and far below the minimum accounting standards. It was so poor they even recommended closing the project!

I was devastated. I locked myself in the room and wept most of the day. I asked myself so many questions but without finding any answers. I could not believe that we had made such grave mistakes despite annual audits. The General Secretary persuaded the donors not to close down funding as the faults were forgivable and could be resolved. The donor accepted and wrote more developmental recommendations. But I still knew that I had failed. I felt I should resign.

But before I implemented this emotional decision, I set apart time to reflect on the consequences. Thank God I had just come from a powerful CSNP leadership training. As I reflected on what I had learnt my thinking changed. I remembered the session on the importance of learning from feedback. When I revisited the section on the Johari Window [*cf page 53*], I saw that this feedback had given me insight into a blind spot. I called to mind what we learnt about integrating spirituality and professionalism. I felt I needed the guidance of the Holy Spirit so I opened my Bible. I was led to a number of stories that showed me that failure is a necessary element to realising the value of a gift. I discovered that when we rely on own perspective and understanding, failures can seem insurmountable. Reading about others in the Bible helped me see the bigger picture.

So, instead of resigning, I summoned up my courage to accept responsibility and start to take action. The heavy recommendations needed to be achieved within three months, so we met as staff and prayed. Together, we resolved to correct the mess. I realised the importance of talking with others in the midst of a crisis and not keeping it to myself. All involved staff willingly

gave up their Christmas celebrations and focused on addressing the issues. We received abundance grace that the work which was to be done in three months was completed in just one month. We are almost at the stage of putting that report in the archive.

When I took courage to act in the face of my failure, God unleashed grace that I have never experienced before. This was one of the most humbling, yet most powerful leadership experiences of my life.

We all fail as leaders. As Dan Allender says, 'Since the weight of complexity and demand is so great, every leader will at some point misuse the power of his position... Failure and loss as a leader are as inevitable as the rising and setting of the sun' (Allender, 2006, page 62). In the Bible, we see the majority of God's appointed leaders were themselves riddled with faults and beset by failures. We should not be so ashamed of our failures. If we do try to pretend that we do not fail or make mistakes, this has adverse consequences. Again Allender points out, 'To the degree you attempt to hide or dissemble your weaknesses, the more you will need to control those you lead, the more insecure you become and the more rigidity you will impose' (Allender, 2006, page 3).

To recognise where we fail is not a choice: it is a gift. We tend to think of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities as something that needs to be healed. In fact, God often uses them as part of his design and to reveal his grace. *The Message* translation of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' is 'the gift of a handicap'. A broken leader is no longer driven by the need to impress people or secure their approval. Acknowledging failure can have truly beneficial effects. Failure is the quickest way to learn humility. Allender goes on to say:

'To the degree you face and name and deal with your failures as a leader; to that same extent you will create an environment conducive to growing and retaining productive and committed colleagues… The surest success comes through being honest about failure. This is definitely not an easy path… If you do not have the capacity to confess, acknowledging in real time how much you mess up, the result will be a workplace that becomes more cowardly and employees who become more self-committed, more closed to you and to one another and more manipulative… (Allender, 2006)

When things go wrong in our leadership, it is as if we have been put into a 'crucible'. We begin to ask big questions such as, Who am I? Who could I be? Who should I be? Extracting wisdom from such difficulties is what distinguishes successful leaders from the rest. The Bible overflows with examples of 'adaptive capacity' to learn and move on from difficulties. It also frequently condemns people for being 'stiff-necked' – unwilling to learn and change.

Confession

> *'Appropriate public admission of failure can lead a community into acknowledgement of its shared humanity, maybe even an experience of grace.'*[24]
> Wisely and Lynn

A key element of learning from failure is to be honest about it. Leadership is all about creating trust. Trust comes where there is a willingness to confess failure. The latest management research on trust in organisations concludes, 'In the research if there has been a serious mistake, leaders needed to verbally apologise to the workforce in order to start to be trusted again… When senior managers make a mistake, apologising for their error actually increases trust' (Hope-Hailey *et al*, 2012, pages 7, 45).

The truth about confession is that it does not lead to people's disrespect (as they know our weaknesses all too well already), but rather paradoxically it transforms our character and earns us greater respect and authority. Sadly, most of us as leaders invest too much time and effort in obscuring our need for grace, thereby damaging ourselves and those around us.

Having the humility to apologise can unlock solutions to apparently intractable situations. Saying sorry can transform relationships. A friend told me about how he was taken on to manage a change programme in a large Christian NGO. He thought this meant he would be drawing up plans and doing critical path analysis and all the usual good planning procedures to get the change programme off the ground. Instead, he found himself listening to frustrated people, angry people, people in tears.

[24] Quoted in Conger 1994

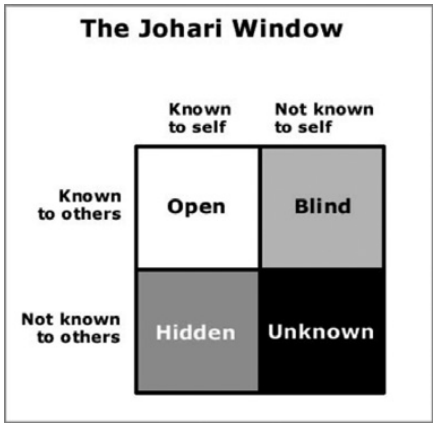
He called a meeting of staff and presented the lessons from the previous few years of attempted change. But more important than his analysis was what happened next. The acting director stood up and said simply: 'I'm so sorry'. He was deeply sorry for the mistakes the leadership had made and for the pain they had caused. At first, there was silence. And then one of the middle managers stood up. 'I never thought I would hear that word from the lips of our leadership team,' he said with tears in his eyes. 'Only my dog knows what I have been through in the last few years.' That was the turning point at which reconciliation began. It took a brave leader to say 'sorry' that day, but God honoured his humility.

The way we lead should point people to the gospel. This may be more about telling stories about our failure and our need for grace rather than ones about our achievements. Being honest about failure puts God back at the centre of our leadership. It helps us recognise that any success is a token of grace, a passing gift, to be enjoyed while it lasts.

Learning humility from feedback

> 'No-one ever really changes for the better without somehow facing the truth.'
> John White

Feedback is essential for all leaders. Without feedback, we remain unaware of our blind spots. The Johari Window (see diagram, right) is a commonly used model for understanding blind spots. It is only through some sort of feedback about things that are 'known to others' and 'not known to self' that we can reduce the size of the blind spot quadrant.



Feedback plays a critical role in developing leaders. It reminds me of one NGO leader I worked with in Malawi talking about how critical feedback from her board forced her to change her autocratic approach. Fifteen years later, she has gone on to become State President.

Learning from feedback – the road to the presidency

Joyce Banda established NABW in 1990 to help Malawian women become economically empowered. Only then, she believed, would they be able to realise their social and political rights. Joyce herself had suffered an abusive marriage, before leaving eventually with her three children.

Once NABW was registered, it grew very quickly. By the end of 1991, there were already 2,500 members. But already there were problems with the supposed beneficiaries at the grassroots level. Joyce explains, '*Sometimes people would get excited but, when they did not understand what I was doing, they gave up. They left. The impact I was making was completely weak. Mobilisation was weak. Because I was seen to own the initiative, they wanted me to be the provider. They said, "Just tell us how you want us to do it."*' The goal of empowerment was a long way from the reality of ongoing dependence.

This led Joyce to agree with the donor to do a national needs assessment. The radio announced this just before a NABW board meeting. 'By the time I got to the board meeting, they had heard the radio announcement. They were not talking to me. I asked, "What is going on?" They replied, "What is going on is that we do not know what you are doing. We are not interested in continuing to work with you. Who says we need a needs assessment? And what is a needs assessment?" The board meeting did not end well. I was upset. I did not apologise. Did they not understand that I was just doing my best, trying to make this organisation a success?'

Joyce went home in a state. '*I was very angry indeed. The board was not grateful, but I was doing all I could. I felt bitter and frustrated. As I sat, I thought, I either have to give up or change something. I was determined not to give up – my own situation of my previous marriage made me think there must be other women out there who are not as fortunate as me, being beaten and not having the economic security to resist. So that night, the questions I asked myself was: 'What am I going to do? Do I look for another board or can I change me? Can I come down? Can I lower myself and work with the same committee?'*

As Joyce thought about it, she realised that she had a serious problem. She had not been able to release control to be able to share her vision with others. She realised that she was being held back by a fear of losing power and a human desire to dominate, especially in a culture where leadership is expected to be distant and autocratic, where chiefs are chiefs for life. But what it had left was an alienated board and dependent women members. It was, in her words, *'as if I had been in deep sleep and had just woken up and realised for the first time that it is not going to work if I take on things on my own'*.

She decided not to have any NABW activities again until the board had had a brain-storming session to plan the future. Things soon changed. The results of this personal shift were amazing. The most difficult board member became her greatest support. '*Once she internalised the vision, she was more passionate than I* was,' says Joyce. NABW continued to grow to the point where it had more than 30,000 members. Most importantly, lives were being changed at the grassroots. Joyce describes seeing *'the greatest joy on the faces of rural business women when they feel what they have done is their initiative'*. In 1997, Joyce was able to take the rare step of a founder leader, to retire graciously and hand over her leadership to a new director and watch as the NABW continues to thrive.

This allowed Joyce herself to take a more political role. In 2012, she became the State President of Malawi.

Source: James (2005)

As leaders, we can influence the culture of our organisation. People notice what we measure, pay attention to and reward. Leaders can promote an honest learning culture by having regular meetings with staff to review activities. Leaders can ask for sincere feedback from colleagues. When people open up, we need to be genuinely attentive and never punish people for their feedback. It is particularly important to hear honest feedback from those below us in the hierarchy.

We can also set up formal appraisal systems for ourselves. Confidential 360° appraisal systems – whereby our performance is judged by those on all sides of us (including our staff below and our boards above) – may be excellent ways to ensure that we receive honest feedback. While such feedback may not always be easy to digest, it is good for our learning and for cultivating our humility.

We also need friends or peers outside the organisation who can play the role of accountability partners. One Christian leader I know meets up with four old school friends twice a month to discuss the work issues they are facing and how they are performing. We all need true friends who will speak the truth to us. We should also not reject 'prickly' people who do not always agree with us. We would even do well to seek them out.

The fruit of humility

As leaders, our humility comes under constant attack. Some may fawn over us. Others may fear us or try to tear us down. An accurate realisation of who we are is essential if we are to lead change effectively. Humility is like a fragile flower that needs to be nurtured and carefully cultivated. As leaders, we need to develop systems to protect and develop authentic humility. As well as being ruthlessly honest with ourselves about our own failures and weaknesses and being prepared to acknowledge them publicly, we can also cultivate humility: by setting up systems for feedback; by regularly considering the question of succession; and by spending quality time with God. If we are able to cultivate humility, it will bear good fruit.

Open to learning

> *'When I discuss the leadership of organisational change with executives, I usually go to the place they least expect. The bottom line is that they cannot change the organisation unless they first change themselves.'*
> Robert Quinn

Humility is generative. In other words, it encourages growth, learning and development. If we think we know it all, not only are we fooling ourselves, but we close ourselves down to learning. The change management guru, John Kotter, followed the progress of 115 of his students from Harvard. He found that the one who stood out above all others was characterised by humility. Kotter explains, 'Confronting his mistakes, Marcel minimised the arrogant attitudes that often accompany success. With a relatively humble view of himself, he watched more closely and listened more carefully than most of the others' (Kotter, 2002, page 180). Bennis and Thomas's study of highly successful American business leaders this century concluded that 'to the extent that any single quality determines success, that quality is adaptive capacity (the ability to learn from difficult experiences)' (2003:91).

NGO research in Asia and Africa (Smillie and Hailey, 2000; James, 2008) revealed that learning leaders are the key to learning organisations. One of the participants at a leadership learning event put this into sharp focus:

Open to advice

I began to be a leader at a tender age. I took over from the missionaries to lead the Training and Development Centre and no one gave me a chance because of my age. What made me succeed was the fact that I was willing to learn. I was also friendly and open to advice and most importantly I was, and still am, a God-fearing woman. Even when I faltered, it was easy for people to approach me and thus things were sorted out. My slogan was: 'Add value to yourself so that you may have impact on others.'

Organisations can only change as much as the leader is prepared to change him or herself. As Larry Bossidy, President of Honeywell Computers and deputy to Jack Welch at General Electric, said, 'I can only change this company as quickly as I can change myself.' Research with African NGO leaders found that 'leadership commitment to organisational change was in practice synonymous with their commitment to their own personal change' (James, 2008).

Transforming others

A great leader obviously cannot and should not do everything on his or her own. The real power of effective leadership is about inspiring others and maximising their potential, as we will explore in greater depth in Chapter 6. This means that, to be effective, leaders have to allow others to grow and ensure that the credit goes to those others. Humble leaders inspire higher performance and also encourage others to aspire to become like them.

In fact, some would argue that charisma is a leadership liability (Collins 2008). If too much depends on the leader's charismatic personality, their leadership is unsustainable. What happens when they cannot be everywhere? What happens when they are not there at all? If your church or your NGO declines when you are away travelling, then you have failed. A humble leader takes real pleasure in seeing others fulfil their potential and exceed even their own dreams.

Such humility is contagious. Humility can catalyse others to change and grow towards their potential. When leaders admit failures publicly, this invites others to look more honestly at their own need for forgiveness, freedom and courage.

Lightening the burden of leadership

> *'I have come to realise that perhaps we were effective only to the extent that we were, in Henri Nouwen's celebrated phrase, "wounded healers"'*
> Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Great leaders quickly realise that the belief that they can control their organisations is a myth. Again, both personal experience and management research confirm that it is impossible for leaders to control complex situations. Coercion works only temporarily at best. Sometimes, all we can do is disturb a situation and watch how people react. There is a certain freedom in accepting our inability to control other people. We are not all-knowing and all-powerful like God. By giving people free will, even God gave up control. Jesus let the rich young ruler walk away.[25] Accepting that we cannot control the complex situations in our organisations removes some of the burden of leadership.

Humility maintains perspective and even brings the confidence to say: I don't know if I am right, nor am I sure the path chosen is the best, but after reflection, feedback, debate and prayer, I am choosing this path.' (Allender, 2006, page 74)

It forces us to acknowledge once more our dependence on God. Perhaps one reason why Jesus' words, 'For my yoke is easy and my burden is light',[26] seem such a long way from our practical experience of leadership is because we have taken on responsibilities that are not ours. As the poet TS Eliott says, 'Ours is only the trying. The rest is not our business.'

[25] Mark 10:17–27
[26] Matthew 11:30

Time for reflection

- *How do I protect and nurture humility?*
- *What systems do I have for getting regular feedback?*
- *Who talks to me really honestly?*
- *What did I learn from my last experience of failure?*
- *When did I last change as a leader? What do I need to learn next?*
- *When did I last make a genuine apology at work?*
- *When will it be time to leave? How am I preparing my organisation for succession?*

5. Self-discipline in leadership

Jesus still asks us as leaders today: 'What good is it to you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul'?[27]

Leaders so often become beasts of burden. We can carry the weighty and unrelenting demands of others, rather than pursuing the will of God. In the busyness of our daily leadership lives, it is all too easy to lose sight of our calling. Even more serious, we may lose sight of the One who calls. Many Christian leaders are so consumed by their ministry, the work they are doing for Jesus, that they lose the very spiritual vitality they are promoting. This has a major cost to the individuals themselves. It affects their physical, emotional and spiritual health. It also damages the organisations they lead.

If we do not have the self-discipline to look after ourselves, it may cause exhaustion and burn-out. Henri Nouwen relates:

> 'I came face to face with the simple question, "Did becoming older bring me closer to Jesus?"… Everyone was telling me I was doing well, but something inside me was telling me that my success was putting my own soul in danger… I woke up one day with the realisation that I was living in a very dark place and that the term burn-out was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death.' (Nouwen, 2006, page 11)

We mistakenly believe that our current relentless pace is what leadership requires. We allow ourselves to get so busy that we no longer have time for listening to God. There is so much other noise going on. We fail to notice those places where God is at work and then ask ourselves what this means. We long for God to speak to us, but we do not really stop to listen. We can lose our ability to hear God's voice. We can lose our clarity of calling. We can lose our sense of perspective. As with anything, overwork and stress invite some degree of physical, emotional or even spiritual breakdown, as the story on the next page warns.

[27] Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36

Beware of burn-out

My church leader was the most amazing man I have met. He was a great charismatic leader. He spoke into my life in an incredibly powerful way on so many occasions. He touched so many lives. So many people depended upon him. Whenever you went to see him, there was a queue of between five and 20 people waiting outside.

I was concerned that he was spending so much of his time responding to other people's demands. But there seemed no other option. The second-line leadership in the church did not seem to have the authority and discernment to take his place.

Last year, everything fell apart when the leader had a massive stroke. He was rushed to hospital. Very gradually over the course of the last year, he has regained movement and speech. His stroke may have had nothing to do with how he managed his time, but it made me think: being a good steward of our time is not merely good advice to be an effective leader, it is a command from God which is essential to our own well-being.

Too much work can easily become a vicious spiral. Initially, too much stress and too little time encourage leaders to become more autocratic. As Harold Geneen points out: 'Most CEOs slip into authoritarian roles without realising that the process is going on. Subtly they change because it is easier and less time-consuming to be authoritarian.' The more autocratic they become, the more they take on themselves and the less they trust and value others. This quickly leads to increased frustration and eventual burn-out. This causes some leaders to leave the church, giving up on their ministry. Others fall into temptation because they have lost their spiritual strength to resist. This further damages the organisations and churches they lead.

Having self-discipline is not just about avoiding the pitfalls of overwork. We need the self-discipline to care for ourselves as this order in our lives creates the space for ideas, creativity, compassion, energy and fun.

A leader cannot lead others effectively without self-discipline. This discipline is not a one-off event but a daily struggle – and one which may even get harder the higher we climb up the leadership ladder. To be self-disciplined in leadership, we have to:

1. Know ourselves
2. Live within our limits
3. Cultivate friends
4. Care for our souls.

Know yourself

'When we set out to do good, but carry out our attempts without the discipline of attending to our own stuff which lies beneath and opening ourselves up to God's presence, evil is always close at hand.'
Ruth Haley Barton

'A leader is someone with the power to project either shadow or light onto some part of the world and onto the lives of the people who dwell there' (Palmer, 2000, page 78). A leader shapes the culture of the organisation. To be an effective leader requires that we look inside ourselves and overcome our fears of seeing ourselves as we really are. For, 'if we say we have no sin, then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us'.[28] This is a basic biblical truth and yet how easily we let our pride blind us. It takes courage to know ourselves. We need to pray purposefully with the psalmist, David, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart'.[29] Being self-conscious is not the same as being self-aware. Christian leaders have in fact been advocating self-awareness for centuries:

St Augustine:
'How can you draw close to God when you are far away from your own self? Grant Lord that I might know myself that I might know thee.'

St Teresa of Avila:
'Almost all problems in the spiritual life stem from a lack of self-knowledge.'

Thomas à Kempis:
'The highest and most profitable reading is the true knowledge and consideration of ourselves.'[30]

[28] 1 John 1:8
[29] Psalm 139:23
[30] *The imitation of Christ*

If we are to have true knowledge of ourselves, we must spend time with God and let his Holy Spirit shine his light in our 'hearts of darkness'. We need to listen attentively to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, however painful it is. We know that it is only out of a close relationship with God that we operate effectively both as people and as leaders.

Secular leadership theory again is approaching biblical truth by emphasising that effective leaders are highly self-aware (Kakabadse, 1999; Quinn, 2000; Adair, 2002). According to Dotlich and Noel, 'Leaders with self-awareness are more likely to move quickly and confidently and in different directions, without needing to be consistently right and in control' (1999, page 187). If we do not really know ourselves, we cannot act decisively and we lack the assuredness necessary to make a decision that runs counter to conventional wisdom.

Unless we are aware of the baggage we bring into every situation, we run the risk that it will manipulate and even destroy the situation. As Ruth Haley Barton warns above, if we are not aware of our own 'stuff', evil is always close at hand. We remember Moses who, in responding to the injustice of the Egyptian, took matters into his own hands and murdered him.

Knowing ourselves helps us to manage the areas where we are tempted. Each of us, like Jesus, will be tempted. The higher we rise in leadership, the stronger our temptations will be. We can easily become addicted to a variety of unhelpful behaviours that cut us off from God. For example, some leaders become addicted to fire-fighting. They like the adrenaline rush of an emergency. The absence of such intensity can lead to boredom and irritation. Because leadership is lonely, many leaders become isolated. We may be tempted to fill our loneliness with addictive behaviour, such as lust or corruption.

Consistently examining ourselves makes us more aware of our strengths and our weaknesses. This helps keep us in contact with our calling. It also helps us remain aware of our temptations. As Palmer puts it, 'By failing to look at our shadows, we feed a dangerous delusion that leaders too often indulge: that our efforts are always well-intended, our power is always benign, and the problem is always in those difficult people whom we are trying to lead' (Palmer, 2000, page 79). Knowing our weaknesses means they are less likely to manipulate the situation. It may also allow

God the opportunity to turn our weaknesses into strengths. After all, the Bible says, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'[31]

Having the courage to know ourselves requires a deep sense of security. As Parker Palmer writes:

> 'One of the biggest shadows inside a lot of leaders is the deep insecurity about their own identity. Therefore, they deprive other people of their identities as a way of dealing with the unexamined fears in the leaders themselves… The greatest spiritual gift that comes when one takes the inward journey is to know for certain that who I am does not depend on what I do' (quoted in Conger *et al*, 1994).

Discovering and dealing with what lies beneath is critical. As with Moses, God may require us to sort this out first before we can fulfill our true leadership calling where the stakes are much higher. We only change when we realise that we are not the person we thought we were or hoped to be (James, 2005). God uses this painful realisation to catalyse change. It is so dangerous if we as leaders are not routinely inviting God to search us and know us and lead us in a new way. We need to embark on the journey of self-knowledge that leads us beyond the false self to living and leading from our authentic self.

In our rigorous self-searching, we must also be prepared to forgive ourselves and allow God to forgive us. None of us is perfect. In the Bible, King David, who was described as a man after God's own heart,[32] was also a murderer and adulterer. We should allow God's Holy Spirit to convict us where we have gone wrong, but we should not allow ourselves to hide or wallow in shame or condemnation. Rodha's story on the next page shows how, when good leaders make mistakes, they forgive themselves, pick themselves up and move on into God's calling, by his grace and forgiveness.

[31] 2 Corinthians 12:9
[32] 1 Samuel 13:14

The prodigal daughter – Rodha's story

I was such a rebel at school it almost shattered my future. I was brought up a Christian, but in my late teens, I stopped going to the church and fell in with a bad crowd. I enjoyed a riotous life, drinking and partying, until the inevitable happened. I became pregnant. This was like a slap in the face of my parents. At just 20, I gave birth to my baby boy. Yet still I continued in my riots. In fact, I became more rebellious than before. I did not even want to see my parents despite their love for me.

Much as I was consumed in my waywardness, deep down I could sense a calling force that was trying to reverse my direction. The Bible my father had given me remained permanently in my handbag. I could not get one particular worship song out of my head. I began to withdraw from the bad company of friends. I cried out to God 'Why can I not get saved?' He answered me. No one, including my own pastor, could believe my salvation. Miracles do happen.

I was soon celebrating double miracles because about this time an NGO sponsored me to do a seven-week training of trainers course at Daystar University. A while later, I successfully applied to that same NGO to be an assistant coordinator on a women's literacy project. I remember meeting my colleague, Grace, on that day of interviews. Little did I know that 13 years later we would still be working together.

In the first four years, we had managed over 300 literacy classes countrywide, with over 600 teachers. This involves a lot of travelling across the country, teaching and coordinating people on the ground. But we wanted to do more and developed a proposal for a revolving loan fund. The donor shot it down. They urged us to think smart. We thought again and learnt from another NGO. This gave birth to TUINUANE ('Let us lift up one another') in 2005. The idea is that community members first save money themselves in groups. They can then each borrow from that same pot. There are now some 600 groups of 25 women countrywide. We are reaching more than 15,000 women and their families.

It would have been so easy to remain off the rails. But I am now a proud single mother of one son, plus two adopted boys from my late sister. Because God helped me change, he has used me in transforming the lives of thousands of women. What a privilege. God does not just use angels or perfect people. He also changes and works through broken and even dissolute lives. He works through me – and you!

Live within your limits

> *'The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence... It destroys the fruitfulness of [one's] work because it kills the roots of inner wisdom which make work fruitful.'*
> Douglas Steere[33]

Many of us resist the idea of limits. We see limits as something to overcome, something that reveals a lack of faith. In fact, knowing and living within our limits is a gift to us and those around us. But this needs self-control and good time management in particular.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.[34] As it says in Proverbs, 'Self-control is better than power.'[35] A key part of self-control is choosing to live within our limits. Living within our limits is a core spiritual value (Scazzero, 2003). We are not God. None of us is superhuman. We cannot serve everyone. We cannot do everything. We cannot function beyond human limits and do everything we would like to. As the Bible says, we should 'keep within the field God has assigned to us'.[36] We therefore need to know the limits of what God has called us to do. We need to live within those limits – both as individuals and as organisations. If we go beyond what God has assigned for us, we will suffer. We will exhaust ourselves and those around us. Our bodies are not built for going beyond our limits.

Leaders are all tempted to be too busy. Moses needed Jethro to tell him in no uncertain terms that he had limits and what he was doing was not good, either for himself or for the people of Israel. This current culture of busyness affects church leaders as much as anyone else. In a recent survey of 20,000 Christians worldwide, '65% rushed from task to task in a way that interferes with their relationship with God' (Barton, 2008, page 118). Like Moses, we need to learn that we have to trust others, believe in them and delegate to them. We need humility to overcome the insidious thought that 'only I can do this well enough'.

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[33] Quoted by Kaplan, 2002, page 187
[34] Galatians 5:22
[35] Proverbs 16:32 (The Message)
[36] 2 Corinthians 10:13

Time is a gift from God. Time is our friend, not our enemy. Time is not 'against us' but we have to steward it wisely. Each new day is a gift from God that will never come again. If we are too busy, we have probably been too lazy or not courageous enough to prioritise. As Ruth Haley Barton says, 'A busy person is not so much active as lost' (2008, page 128). When we refuse to be intentional, we become too busy. Responding to need is very different from responding to calling. Even Jesus did not respond to every need. He took himself off on his own when people were looking for him to heal them. Leaders need the courage to say 'no' regularly and routinely. We have to forsake the good things of men for the great things of God. We need to be very clear about our calling to be able to differentiate between the two.

Steven Covey[37] provides a helpful way of analysing how we spend our time:

Time management grid

Importance \ Urgency		
	Quadrant 1 Urgent and Important 'Fire-fighting'	Quadrant 2 Important but not urgent 'Quality time'
	Quadrant 3 Urgent but not important 'Distraction'	Quadrant 4 Neither urgent nor important 'Time wasting'

Time management exercise:

Put your activities of last week into these quadrants:

- Which of your leadership activities fit in each quadrant?
- What do you see?
- What are the results of too much time being spent in different quadrants?

Ask yourself: 'How can you put more time in Quadrant 2?

Initially, this can only come from Quadrants 3 and 4. How do you do this? How can you protect and invest more time in Quadrant 2?

[37] See his classic work Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989

Cultivate friends and fun

'Self-care is never a selfish act – it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on the earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to our true selves and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch.'
Parker Palmer

Leadership is often lonely. One of the biggest challenges for leaders is to maintain and develop friendships. Our bodies and souls need the support of friends. We need to relax and have fun. As Dan Allender says, 'A leader with no close friends is a leader who is prone to swing between hiding and manipulating. A leader will serve an institution no better than she lives as a friend' (2008, page 114). We know friendships need effort. We have to invest time in them. But they can pay great dividends as Grace and Rodha's story below illustrates.

Let us lift up one another – Grace and Rodha's story

When my husband died and my in-laws insisted I give them my children, I became very depressed. I was so sick that I was eventually admitted to Nairobi Hospital for six weeks with depression. It was only my work colleagues, Gunnveig and Rodha, who stood by me. They helped pay the rocketing hospital bills. Rodha was giving money to my siblings and even my sister-in-law who depended on me. When I got anaemic in the hospital and needed blood urgently, it was not my family, but my workmates who donated blood. I suppose they know me better than my family members.

I thank God for their role in my life. I think I would have been dead by now, considering the severe depression I had. My sister Rodha is my great mirror. Rodha and I work on a project to empower rural women called TUINUANE. This means 'Let us lift up one another'. Rhoda is more than a colleague. She is my best friend. She lifts me up every day.

Care for your soul

As well as cultivating our relationships with others, we have to care for our souls by investing time in our personal relationship with God. We need a spiritual rhythm in our leadership. Too many Christian leaders lose their sense of intimacy with God because they become too busy. We need to find God in the context of our leadership, rather than miss God in the busyness of it all.

Jesus made time to spend with God and even more so when things became busy for him. Luke's gospel says, 'The news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.'[38]

As leaders, we too need time in solitude with God. This allows us to recalibrate – to restore a true perspective on God's activity and our leadership. We need moments in our lives when we let the chaos settle a bit and invite God to show us evidence of his presence at work, both in big ways and in subtle ways. We begin to notice those things that we would otherwise miss in the pace and complexity of our lives, as Ruth Haley Barton writes:

> 'The spiritual law of gravity ensures that the chaos of the human soul will settle if it sits still long enough… We are less and less mesmerised by human voices, less and less manipulated by the expectations of others and our inner compulsions… In solitude we are rescued from relentless human striving to solve the challenges of ministry through intellectual achievements and hard work… In silence we give up control and allow God to be God in our life rather than being a thought in our head.' (Barton, 2008, page 47)

Time alone with God preserves our souls and protects us from pride. In solitude we stop believing our own press. We refocus our identity on being a child of God. As Haley Barton continues, 'Without the regular experience of being received and being loved by God in solitude and silence, we are vulnerable to a kind of leadership that is driven by profound emptiness that we are seeking to fill through performance and achievement' (Barton, 2008, page 126).

It gives us time to rest. Jesus said, 'Come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.'[39] We know from sport that recovery and rest time are an integral part of sustained performance. All human beings need time to renew and develop energy reserves. So why do we view the need for rest in our leadership as evidence of weakness? There is an energy that comes from being rested that is different from the energy that comes from being driven.

[38] Luke 5:15–16
[39] Matthew 11: 28

To remove ourselves from the leadership arena, even for a short time, can be difficult. It may feel impossible. There are undoubtedly many logistical challenges. But perhaps our resistance is more about us being unwilling to face our anxiety about withdrawing from the arena of leadership from which so much of our sense of identity derives.

Some leaders have developed their own spiritual rhythms or rules to help regulate their work life. One I know takes two hours off every other Friday to spend time with God and pray about the organisation. Another takes a day a month out of the office. Both invest time in annual retreats. In a smaller way, I have found the 'examen' process recommended by St Ignatius very helpful[40]. This is a spiritual exercise intended to refine our capacity to see and respond to God in our everyday lives. It helps me to align myself with what God is doing. In this examen, I take time to look back on my day, my week, my month or my year and notice what has stirred my emotions:

- When have I felt God's presence most strongly in my leadership? Where has there been a sense of life-giving connection with God? (St Ignatius called these 'consolations'.)
- When have I felt God's absence most keenly? When have I moved away? (St Ignatius called these 'desolations'.)

The fruit of self-discipline

Caring for your soul is vital for any Christian leader. It is the most important thing you can do. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. If we open ourselves up to God and manage ourselves in a self-disciplined way, God can transform us and those around us. He can use us to effect change in seemingly impossible situations.

God works in the leader before he works through the leader. We have to be prepared to go where we would like others to follow. As Dan Allender points out, 'I can take no one further than where I've chosen to go. I can never ask them to be more honest, more humble, more forgiving or more sacrificial than I am willing to live' (Allender, 2008, page 151). Or, in the words of Henri Nouwen, 'The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there'.[41]

[40] See for example http://www.ignatianspirituality.com
[41] Nouwen (1979) *The wounded healer*

When we care for our own souls through self-discipline, this gives us the emotional and spiritual resources to lead others, as we explore in the next chapter. Our personal spirituality should infuse our leadership. And as it says in Proverbs, 'Good tempered leaders invigorate lives; they're like spring rain and sunshine.'[42]

Time for reflection

- *How am I nurturing my soul and spirit for leadership?*
- *What are the limits to the field God has assigned me to? How faithful am I to these limits?*
- *Where do I spend my time? How can I better manage my time?*
- *Where do I need to be more disciplined?*
- *Where must I guard against temptation?*
- *What refreshes me? What gives me energy and fun?*
- *What do I commit myself to doing to change any imbalances in my life?*

[42] Proverbs 16:15 *(The Message)*

6. Leading others

> *'Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.'*
> Albert Schweitzer

Leadership is a relationship. It is about investing ourselves in others to influence their vision, values, behaviours or actions. Leaders exist to serve the people who look to them for leadership. Their job is to help followers realise their potential so that they may successfully contribute to the mission that brings leader and follower together (Wright, 2006).

At the start of this book, we asked ourselves, 'Why should anyone be led by you?' We have come to see that we can only lead others well if we are able to lead ourselves well: with a strong ongoing sense of calling; with courage to take difficult decisions; with humility to recognise our limits; and with rigorous self-discipline in caring for our soul. If we are not able to lead ourselves well, it may be better not to inflict our poor leadership on others.

This chapter will focus on how we can best lead others. This involves:
1. Believing in them and praying for them
2. Inspiring them
3. Coaching them and giving honest feedback
4. Loving and forgiving them.

Believing in them and praying for them

> *'The task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.'*
> John Buchan

To lead other people effectively, we have first to understand them. As Jesus said, 'I know my sheep and my sheep know me.'[43] We need spiritual discernment to see people with God's eyes. We have to understand

[43] John 10:14

people's character and current competence to identify how they fit with the organisation's needs, and to see how we can support them to reach their potential. This does not mean that we are blind to their limitations and faults. Some problems of leadership in churches can be traced back to poor selection of staff and second-line leadership. Sometimes, appointments are made on the basis of sympathy or as a reward for loyalty or long-term service. This is clearly not God's way. God chose Elisha to succeed Elijah,[44] not one of the 50 long-serving prophets from Bethel. Naive belief in people who do not have the necessary character or competence will end in disaster. We must try to understand who God made them to be with the talents they have been given.

More than simply understanding them, we need to believe in them – enough to trust them with significant responsibility. We sometimes view staff as more of a liability than an asset, even in Christian organisations. Some leaders feel they have trusted staff in the past, only to be let down and disappointed. Many are really not sure whether staff have the capacity and commitment to perform. One Christian leader I know confided how she struggled to delegate to staff and compromise her self-professed perfectionism. However, her lack of trust in others inevitably meant that she missed deadlines. The performance of the organisation suffered. She also described how important her faith was in learning both to trust people more and to trust God more for positive outcomes.

Although we know that we are just one part of the body,[45] leaders sometimes imagine they are the most important part. In fact, the essential role of a great leader is to draw out the best in his or her staff. John Buchan said, 'The task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there'.[46] (This should not be a surprise to us as we are created in the image of God.) Or, as Goethe said, 'Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be.[47]' But one of the difficult responsibilities is that 'the leader must go first in the game of trust'.

Again Jesus leads by example. Despite Peter's painful denials when Jesus was arrested, Jesus still believed in his potential. People become what others expect them to be. After all, Gideon was hardly a mighty man

[44] 1 Kings 19:16
[45] 1 Corinthians 12
[46] Quoted by Adair (2002, page 256)
[47] Quoted by Covey 1992:57

of valour before the angel described him in that way. Great leadership involves following the example of God, 'who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were'.[48] As we said above, we have to believe in people's potential by seeing them through God's eyes.

The best way to do this is by praying for them. By regularly praying for our staff as special individuals, loved by God, we may get a glimpse of how God sees them. This insight can help us cry out to God on their behalf. Intercessory prayer is one of the basic functions of spiritual leadership. Despite everything that the Israelites did and despite all their complaints, Moses interceded relentlessly for his people.[49] Prayer changes the dynamic of the relationship between us as leaders and our followers in a positive way.

Inspiring them

> *'Striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man.'*
> Victor Frankl

If we understand and believe in our followers, we will be in a position to empower them responsibly. Jesus modelled an empowering style of leadership towards his disciples. He gave them responsibility, trusting them sufficiently to send them out two-by-two without him. If staff are empowered, the organisation is likely to be more effective, because more people are pulling their weight.

This empowerment should not be, however, without vision and direction. It is an outworking of our sense of calling. If we want motivated staff, we have to create meaning for our followers. Such meaning is the difference between one person who feels that their job is 'building a cathedral for God' and another doing the very same job who feels he is merely 'carrying bricks'. We need to consistently inspire followers with the vision that God has given us. Victor Frankl, the eminent psychiatrist, points out that 'striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man' (1946, page 121).

[48] Romans 4:17b
[49] Exodus 17:3–4

Yet, more than simply having a vision, responsible empowerment involves sitting down with staff and specifying desired results, ensuring that any important guidelines and principles are followed and accountabilities are clear. This is about coming to a mutual agreement about directions and expectations, not about ensuring control. Many leaders behave as if their main role were to discipline staff. Such leaders inevitably find their organisations stagnating and dying.

Coaching them with honest feedback

> *'You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him discover it within himself.'*
> Galileo

The people we work with are almost never the finished product. They can improve with coaching. Sometimes, we delegate without helping people grow into the competencies and confidence they need to take on extra responsibilities. As leaders, we have considerable opportunities to coach our staff – and we must make the most of these opportunities. Coaching is about bringing out the best in them, minimising the gap between potential and performance. Like a good sports coach, we can help them analyse their performance and think through how they can improve. We can provide ongoing support as they try out new things.

If leaders understand the capacity of their staff and are dedicated to help them reach their potential, they must spend considerable time and effort in training and developing their followers. John Maxwell describes staff development as 'the most important lesson of leadership' (Maxwell, 1993, page 179). Some leaders estimate that more than 30 per cent of their time is devoted to this (Hybels, 2002, page 133). Certainly this 'discipling' was at the very heart of Jesus' leadership. We too therefore need to be intentional and active in mentoring our staff. Mentoring is not about telling them how they should behave, but sitting down with them, listening to them, discussing the decisions they want to make, asking questions, challenging them, certainly, but leaving them the responsibility for their own decisions.

In Chapter four on 'Humility in leadership', we saw the value of receiving honest feedback. As leaders, we need to recognise that any feedback we offer is given extra weight by our position of power. Yet, this should not

prevent us from giving people the gift of feedback. Iron sharpens iron. Jesus certainly gave very direct feedback, particularly to the religious leaders of the day. The apostle Paul challenged and corrected Timothy.

But we need to do it well. It must be done in love, with the genuine aim of helping the person improve. We must keep their best interests at heart. We should choose an appropriate time and place. We should be positive. We should focus on the most important and specific behaviour to be addressed, not try and correct everything simultaneously. In this regard, it helps if regular feedback is already part of normal organisational procedures. We should be truthful and honest, but also remember that it is our opinion and it must be delivered with grace. Jesus was described as being 'full of grace and truth'.[50]

Many people have found the 'AID Model' a useful way of making feedback more specific and practical:

AID Model of feedback

Actions – What is the specific behaviour, fact or observation that you are giving the feedback on?

Impact – What is the effect that the person's actions have on others, the work situation, etc?

Desired outcomes – What could the person do differently next time?

Loving and forgiving them

'Men think there are circumstances when they may treat their fellow human beings without love, but no such circumstances exist. If you feel no love for men, leave them alone.'
Leo Tolstoy

As leaders, we may feel that Jesus' command 'Do not judge'[51] does not really apply to our leadership. After all, surely we have to judge staff to manage them? But Jesus is quite categorical. The Bible emphasises love

[50] John 1:14
[51] Matthew 7:1

and grace, not judgement. Jesus loved Zacchaeus unconditionally and believed in him, even though he appeared a corrupt and cruel man. Zacchaeus' amazing act of repentance was a response to this love. Jesus' forgiveness was what transformed Peter, not any condemnation for his public denials. Loving our staff is vital. Even leadership academics such as John Adair say, 'No one can be a really good leader who does not love members of their team or organisation' (Adair, 2002).

Management experience and research have shown that love is a vital element missing from many organisations today. Dorothy Marcic states, 'In my search to understand what has been happening in organisations, I began to see that dysfunctional managers are not the causal factor as I had previously thought, but symptoms of some deeper problem. The root cause is lack of love' (Marcic, 1997). Charles Handy from the London Business School echoes this, 'It may sound odd for a professor of business to say this, but I reckon that our organisations could do with a deal more loving, a bit more forgiveness and a lot more faith in other people. Such things, however, in organisations are only possible if we feel we are in the grip of something bigger than ourselves' (Handy, 1991, page 78). More recently, Jim Collins stated, 'You cannot be a great leader of an organisation that you do not love. To endure terrifyingly difficult decisions, you have to care enough' (Collins, 2008).

Loving your staff means wanting the best for them. This is not a soft love that gives in to all their wishes or removes all boundaries or negative consequences to actions. Nor is it a superficial love. Your staff will see through all that. They have an unerring ability to tell the difference between fake and genuine love. Loving our staff involves listening to them. David Augsburger says, 'Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable' (Scazzero, 2006, page 4). We have to give them credit wherever we can find it. Keeping people dependent on us is not love; real love is about extending ourselves so that our followers can reach their God-given potential. Jesus' example of leadership was of the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.[52]

If we want to instil a culture where our staff have the courage to take risks and even sometimes fail, we have to forgive people regularly. As Walter Wright said, 'Without forgiveness, leadership dies' (Wright, 2000, page 113). But this is not a superficial forgiveness, one which denies the pain of

[52] John 10:11

what went wrong or papers over the cracks. It is not the same as removing the consequences of our actions. Even if we are forgiven, there may still be a price to pay. Neither is forgiveness the same as forgetting. Rather it is remembering mistakes and difficulties in a different way, in a way that does not taint our relationships. Leaders have plenty of opportunities to set an example of forgiving people.

If you are a leader, people will let you down. Charles Handy relates asking a personnel manager why his development programme was so successful. 'In one word he said, "Forgiveness. We give them big jobs. They make mistakes. We correct them, but we forgive them. They learn and grow"' (Handy, 1991, page 124). If leaders want staff to take on greater responsibility, they need to be ready to accept and forgive errors of judgement. If we try and control the situation tightly, in order to avoid any mistakes, we will not have delegated responsibility.

People will also blame you. This is perhaps the most predictable pattern of leadership. Whenever people are uncertain or feel pain, they look for someone to project it onto. The leader is usually the most convenient scapegoat. A good leader therefore needs the stillness and strength of soul to be able to absorb the complaints that will inevitably come.

We see this pattern very clearly in the Exodus story. The people of Israel had been rescued from Egypt miraculously and had miraculous provision of daily manna – yet still they complained bitterly about Moses. Like Moses, we need to refuse to take everything too personally. Yes, we need to hear constructive and critical feedback, but we also need not to accept responsibility for something that ultimately is God's responsibility.

Time for reflection

- *When did I last choose to believe in someone despite the circumstances? What happened?*
- *What messages am I really communicating to my followers?*
- *In what practical ways could I show more love to my team or those for whom I'm responsible?*
- *How much of my time do I spend coaching others?*
- *Whom do I need to forgive at work?*
- *Whom should I be praying for?*

7. Create space for grace in your organisation

'Real or lasting change is rarely, if ever, affected by memo and command. Such change occurs when the spirit changes.'
Harrison Owen

Too often the organisations we lead seem more like soul-less machines or arenas of conflict rather than Spirit-filled places. We need more of God's presence in our leadership and in our organisations. We long for life and energy, fun and creativity, and productive, accepting relationships.

We cannot control God's presence any more than we can control the wind. It is only something that, by our leadership, we can invite. But, as leaders, we do have the opportunity to invite God's Spirit into the hum-drum realities of organisational life. As Jay Conger says, 'If any single catalyst in an organisation is likely to bring a spiritual presence into the workplace, it is a leader' (Conger, 1994, page 6).

Leading ourselves well – following God's calling, summoning up courage, cultivating humility and having the self-discipline to care for our souls – gives us the emotional and spiritual resources to lead others well, as we saw in the last chapter. Importantly, it also enables us to create spaces for God's grace to infuse and transform our organisations.

We have the promise of God's presence in our leadership life, however challenging our circumstances. But we have to seek it, whether with discipline or desperation. We have to want it so much that we pray without ceasing. We have to forge a connection between our personal relationship with God and our leadership, rather than experiencing them as separate arenas of our lives.

Accepting complexity

> *'Show me a leader who is decisive, fiercely independent, dominant and in control and I'll show you someone who doesn't have a clue about how to lead in today's organisations.'*
> David Dotlich

Part of inviting God's presence into an organisation involves first relinquishing our feeble attempts at control. Organisations are incredibly complex. The ways people behave and their hidden motivations are far from black and white. In our day-to-day leadership, we are faced with competing values, demands and perspectives which continually change. So, in almost every organisational situation, it is impossible to predict exactly what will happen and how people will react.

But, when faced by such complexity, we resort to analysis. We cannot cope with ambiguity. We hate ambiguity because it shows that things are not under our control. We dissect the situation until we come to an understanding that we believe allows us to predict, manage and control the problem. We want to believe in an empty promise of certainty. But chaos theory reminds us that every effort to measure, let alone control, a phenomenon not only changes it but moves it in an unpredictable direction (Allender, 2008, page 91). The control we crave is an illusion. The sooner we realise this, the better for our leadership.

Crises can be a healthy reminder that fundamentally we are not in control. Chaos can be the precursor to creativity. As Dan Allender says, 'To effectively address a crisis, a leader must draw on creativity, intuition, wisdom, freedom, commitment and passion. A leader who rules with intimidation squashes these' (Allender, 2008, page 71). A controlling leader always gets what he deserves – the bare minimum and conformity without creativity. No wonder David Dotlich said, 'Show me a leader who is decisive, fiercely independent, dominant and in control and I'll show you someone who doesn't have a clue about how to lead in today's organisations.'(Dotlich and Noel, 1998, page xi)

When we give up our futile attempts at management control, we open up space for God to work. In the book of Genesis, the Spirit hovered over the chaos.[53] It was God who brought order. Any complex or even chaotic

[53] Genesis 1:2

organisational situation invites us to surrender to God. A good leader accepts and even blesses complexity because he or she knows it will expose the myth of control.

Daily surrendering

> *'The spiritual leadership approach finds the solution in contemplation, to approach situations with an attitude of discernment rather than one of intervention; acceptance rather than control; letting go rather than holding on; lightening rather than doing; and in humility rather than competence.'*
> Korac-Kakabadse

In the short stories of leadership we have read throughout this book, we have seen that, by surrendering our leadership to God, this allows the Holy Spirit to breathe life into difficult leadership situations.

As we saw in Chapter 5, we need to nurture our own spirits through our personal relationship with God. But it is not just about keeping that relationship alive in our private lives. We need to integrate it in our leadership activity in the office. The way we lead must be infused and energised by the Holy Spirit.

We need to create rhythms for nurturing our spirit at work, not just in our personal life at home. We should pray for God to give us the gift of leadership.[54] We can pray regularly for our mission, our members, our beneficiaries, our boards, our funders... Getting used to 'praying constantly' at work serves us well when we have decisions to make or when crises occur as they inevitably will. Instead of panicking, we turn to God for wisdom and discernment. When things go wrong and crises hit, our leadership character will be revealed. Emotions will run very high. Everything we say and do will be noticed. We would do well to learn from Moses. He had a very simple leadership strategy – to seek God in solitude and then carry out what God revealed. As the Bible says, 'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him.'[55]

[54] Romans 12:8
[55] James 1:5

Leadership it is not about pretending to have all the answers ourselves. It is about being vulnerable. We allow ourselves as leaders to be the instrument, rather than the controller – the clay rather than the potter.

Setting aside time and space

As leaders, we have the opportunity not just to set our own spiritual rhythms at work but also to influence the spirituality of the organisation as a whole. Leaders can influence the culture more than they probably imagine. As McDermott points out, 'the person with authority is meant to create – or better be the principal agent in creating – a holding environment, a psychological space' (in Conger *et al*, 1994, page 145). Good leaders create safe organisational spaces for people to reflect, listen, pray and hold open discussion about the organisation.

For example, in one Christian human rights NGO, they start the day 30 minutes before the office officially opens with half-an-hour of stillness. There are no phones or email. This gives each individual time to prepare spiritually for the day, to look at what is on their agenda and to talk to God about it. Another Christian organisation starts every day at work with praise. At midday, they stop again and all meet together to renew awareness of God's presence right in the midst of all the busyness and activity. At the end of the day, they also meet to place the cares of the day into God's hands.

Others organisations are in the habit of having times of quiet at the beginning of meetings or at important junctures in any meeting. Others use a 'prayer joker' – a symbol for suddenly stopping analytical discussions that have started to become repetitive and circular, in order to make time to pray.

In some Christian organisations, it is normal for staff to take a day off a month to spend time with God. Their relationship with God and how it is influencing their work is part of the normal conversation for supervisors with those who report to them. These organisations may also have extended staff retreats for teams or the whole staff for two or more days each year.

Creating regular spaces for God's grace should be done in diverse ways. People connect with God in different ways and our practices should

embrace this diversity. I am reminded of one large UK NGO who dispensed with their mid-week 'evangelical-style' worship for all staff. Instead, they set up 10 to 15 different groups who sought to worship God in different ways and at different times. Some groups meditated silently together; others went through an Alpha course; others read a controversial Christian book. The different styles of worship represented the wide range of Christian traditions represented on the staff.

Discerning in decision-making

As well as these regular rhythms of spiritual activities at work, there are also times to seek discernment. This is about looking for God's guidance in a proactive way together when we need specific direction for decision-making. As Ruth Haley Barton says, 'The greater the call for decisive action, the more we must be sure we have waited long enough to receive clear direction.' (Barton, 2008)

Moses prayed: 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way we shall be distinct.'[56] Listening deeply for God's direction must precede any organisational planning. There needs to be a shared desire and willingness to act on the basis of discernment, rather than human planning and strategic manoeuvring.

I learnt the importance of this a few years ago in Malawi. A Christian NGO asked me to facilitate a one-day strategy process for them. I thought they were not investing enough time and said it would take three days to do what they wanted. But they were adamant that one day was all they had, so I agreed. Then, a couple of days before the event, they rang to tell me that in fact it was just going to be an afternoon as they were spending the morning praying together about their future direction. Again, I had no choice but to accept. I was amazed by what happened in that afternoon. In just three hours, they emerged with a clear, prioritised strategy – making major and difficult decisions along the way. A process I thought should take at least three days had been finished in only three hours – because they had sought God. Discernment was key.

[56] Exodus 33:12–16

More recently, I was asked to help bring a spiritual dimension to a meeting of leaders who had to decide which ten percent of staff were going to be made redundant. People were going into this meeting so uncertain and burdened, worried for their colleagues' jobs or indeed for their own. The leadership chose to set aside a half-day before they started, in order to allow space and time with God before making such difficult decisions.

As leaders, we do have the opportunity to influence how our organisations integrate faith into our working life. When we are desperate enough for God's presence, when we accept that we cannot control, but surrender our leadership to God, when we create regular rhythms for God's presence in our working day and when we specifically seek discernment in decision-making... then the Holy Spirit can work through us. And that is when God's grace brings the breakthroughs we yearn for.

Time for reflection

- *What do I need to surrender in my leadership?*
- *How can I create more space for grace in my day-to-day leadership?*
- *What is the spiritual rhythm of our organisation? How inclusive is it?*
- *How can we better discern God's will in important decisions?*
- *If my staff were asked which gods I follow, what would they respond?*
- *What am I teaching through my leadership?*

Conclusions

We started this book with two challenging questions for leaders:

Why is being a leader so tough?
Leadership should be a calling. Something that we feel God wants us to do – whether we like it or not. This sense of calling is important as leadership takes us into difficult, lonely and often painful situations. It takes us beyond our own human resources, where our only option is to depend on God. A strong and clear sense of **calling** is essential as we take on the responsibilities of leadership. We can only really *lead* well, if we are *following* our calling.

Why should anyone be led by you?
We have seen that because Christian leadership is so demanding, how we lead is ultimately about our **character**. We need to lead with a character shaped by:

- radical **courage**
- authentic **humility**
- rigorous **self-discipline**.

It takes courage to seek the will of God and then make decisions in response to his will. It takes humility to admit we do not know the right thing to do all the time and so acknowledge where we go wrong. Courage without humility can be toxic: humility without courage can be passive. Each of these leadership virtues reinforces the other. Courage and humility only really emerge from a life of self-discipline where we care for our souls and have our spirits refreshed continually.

Having a clear calling, radical courage, authentic humility and rigorous self-discipline enables you to lead our own lives well. If we can lead ourselves well, this equips us with the vital emotional and spiritual resources we need to lead others and lead our organisations by:

- Inspiring and **empowering our staff**
- **Inviting God's presence** into the day-to-day life and culture of our organisations.

We have seen that leadership is not about being perfect. Indeed, the paradox of leadership is that God's power is visible and made perfect in our vulnerability and weakness. Leadership is not about tolerating these weaknesses or hiding them, but about allowing God to transform them by his grace. When we recognise that the real enemy is within us, we will stop blaming others when things go wrong. The Bible says that if we try to save our lives, we will lose them. But if we lose our lives for God's sake, we will find true life in him…[57] This is also true for our leadership. If we give up on our leadership career and follow instead our leadership calling, then we will find God's presence in our leadership. So we must give up our focus on performance and focus instead on obedience. We must give up on ourselves and trust in God's grace.

Our identity as leaders is not about our title, our power or our role. Rather, our identity rests on the simple fact that we are all children of God – flawed, yet deeply loved for who we are. Our leadership depends on our identity as followers of Jesus. In this way we echo the words of the Apostle Paul when he said, 'Follow me as I follow Christ.'[58]

[57] Matthew 16:25

[58] 1 Corinthians 4:16 in Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition

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