



12 Devotions for Every Leader



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CHURCH FUEL

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
HEART	
Romans 5:1–5	4
CALLING	
Ephesians 4:11–16	7
WORK	
Colossians 3:12–17	10
TIME	
Ephesians 5:13–21	13
RELATIONSHIPS	
1 John 3:16–18, 4:19–21	16
WORDS	
James 3:1–5	19
VISION	
Proverbs 29:18	22
RESPONSIBILITY	
Romans 12:3–21	25
CREATIVITY	
Luke 5:19	28
RESILIENCE	
Galatians 6:9–10	31
PLANNING	
Luke 14:28–30	34
EVALUATION	
Proverbs 27:23–24	37

Introduction

Every leader spends time pouring into others. We've created this devotional to help you take a moment to be refreshed and to pour back into your team.

To make the devotional easy to use in person or on video, the sidebar includes quick references to a Key Idea, Key Scripture, Notes, and Prayer Prompts.

The format of each devotion was also designed for ease of use. Three questions for team interaction will be highlighted in blue and followed by a facilitator's prompt in gray. Scripture quotations are clearly noted in blue italics. (You may want to ask others to read the Scriptures or read them yourself.)

Use these devotions in whatever way is best for your team. For example:

- Lead your staff, volunteers, or leaders through one devotion every week for twelve weeks, once a month for a year, over a leadership retreat—whatever works for you.
- Send them to your team to use in their personal time and follow up on their progress.
- Record videos, using the devotions as scripts, to share with your staff, volunteers, and leaders.
- Pair them up with our Team Training resource, using the devotions to introduce topics for leadership development.

No matter how you decide to use them, we know they will be a blessing to your team. We pray that they'll be encouraged, focused, and excited for the future of your church.

A Leader's Heart

WHAT ARE SOME UNIQUE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP?

Answers may include tasks related to a particular job or role, church-specific expectations, or general characteristics.

As a leader of the church, you have a unique responsibility. It's a privilege to serve other people of faith and an honor to represent not only the church, but also Christ and the gospel in the community, among neighbors, and wherever you go. Truly, there is no "day off" in the typical sense of word. Needs and expectations always exist. Busyness—even with entirely good things—will wear you thin, weigh you down, and burn you out.

With that in mind, it's your unique responsibility to take care of your own heart. Spiritual intimacy can get lost in ministry activity. The duties of your job will try to demand your attention and affection over your devotion to Jesus. Remind yourself in those times that you do not have to earn God's approval. You can't earn it. No amount of good works for the church will add up to better standing with God. You know this already, but it's good to hear the liberating truth of the gospel. Look at the words of Paul to the church in Rome.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:1-2

KEY IDEA

Leadership requires spiritual health.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

Romans 5:1-5

NOTES

What an incredible reality—justification isn't the end and only result of your faith; it's just the beginning! Look at everything that stems from your justification: peace, access, grace, hope. Now be still for a moment. As someone who is used to pouring time and energy into others, allow God's Word to minister to you. Let these realities sink deep into your heart.

1. Peace

Do you need peace right now? Are you trying to keep up with the ever-changing demands of ministry in today's culture? Know that you are right with God. He is fully pleased with you in Christ. Rest in that freedom.

2. Access

Are you lonely? Do you feel like nobody understands you or your circumstances? Know that you cannot lead in your own strength and wisdom. You have access to the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is with you, always.

3. Grace

Do you feel a pressure to perform? Are you afraid to admit being wrong or not having the answer? Know that you aren't perfect. Set a real example for others of what it looks like to rely on Christ, especially when you make mistakes or don't have an answer.

PERSONALLY, WHERE ARE YOU FEELING THE PRESSURE OF LIFE AND MINISTRY?

Lead by example, sharing a recent stress or struggle of leadership. Invite others to be honest about ways that current circumstances have been a challenge—or have magnified challenges that already existed.

Notice that Paul did not stop with these glorious truths for the church in Rome. He was not naïve to the realities of life in general, especially for the Christian, and even more specifically for leaders of the church. The transforming power of the gospel is not an abstract "spiritual" matter; it's insanely practical in your day-to-day life and leadership right now.

And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

4. Hope

Where is your focus? Are you ultimately drawing attention to yourself or do you help people put their faith in Jesus? Know that nothing is more life-giving than seeing God glorified.

5. Affliction

Are you suffering right now? Is there a circumstance or relationship in your church, community, family, or personal life that is causing pain and stress? Know that God is good and still with you. Pay attention to what the Spirit is doing in your heart to change your character, not just to change the situation.

When tempted to measure God's favor by earthly standards of success, remember Paul's boast. Life is not always easy or predictable. Churches are full of broken people, sinners justified by faith in Christ. Leadership is messy and often painful. But in the end, what could be better?

Christ alone sustains and satisfies our hearts. Whatever challenge you are facing, whatever affliction you endure, be confident that the Holy Spirit will use it to develop Christlike character in your heart. Trust him. Put your hope in him. He will never disappoint. He has filled you with his love and Spirit for his glory. Don't give up. He is with you. Always.

HOW IS YOUR HEART?

Allow a moment for anyone to share the condition of their heart. Remind everyone that it's their unique responsibility to care for their own hearts—don't neglect your health and character as you lead others.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus your heart on the goodness and glory of God.
- Confess areas of distraction, faithlessness, or affliction.
- Thank Christ for giving you peace, access, grace, and hope.
- Ask the Spirit to grow your character and to fill your heart with God's love.

A Leader's Calling

HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN A "CALLING" FROM GOD?

Answers may include: experiences, desires, abilities, opportunities, responsibilities, etc.

The word "calling" has a mysterious and super-spiritual sound to it. Some people certainly have dramatic and even miraculous encounters with God to which anyone can trace a clear change in direction and purpose. Martin Luther, figurehead of the Protestant Reformation, first vowed to become a monk after lightning nearly struck him as a university student. Paul was literally stopped in his tracks, blinded, and told by Jesus that he would become a leader *for* the church as an apostle rather than *against* it as a persecutor.

Most of us would not consider our stories of conversion or calling to be as significant or dramatic as Martin Luther or the Apostle Paul, but any conversion is miraculous. You have been brought from death to life. You were a sinner saved by God's amazing grace. To personalize the great hymn:

you once were lost but now you're found, you were blind but now you see.

So while each of our conversions may truly be miraculous, our callings may not be as clear. Let's see what Paul had to say about calling and ministry.

KEY IDEA

Leaders can't do everything, but everyone can do something.

KEY SCRIPTURE:
Ephesians 4:11–16

NOTES

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

Ephesians 4:11–13

This sentence is a game-changer when it comes to leadership and ministry, especially in understanding your calling.

WHO DOES "THE WORK OF MINISTRY"?

Draw attention back to the phrase "the saints" before pointing out the following implications:

1. All Christians are called to ministry.

Most often, people use the term "calling" in relation to ministry, especially in the sense of a job or position of leadership. Paul says that God expects every Christian to do the work of ministry. In that sense, we are all called to ministry.

2. Leaders are called to equip church members for growth.

The unique calling of a leader is found in the word "equip." Each of us have a specific part to play within the body of Christ. Paul says that God "gave" leaders to the church so that every person would be equipped, built up, and fully mature.

In the book *Leveling the Church: Multiplying Your Ministry by Giving It Away* (Moody, 2020), the authors put it this way:

"Ministry is our familial responsibility as church members.

Multiplication is our vocational responsibility as church leaders."

NOTES

3. You can't and shouldn't do all the work.

God doesn't expect you to do everything. As leaders, it's not possible for us to do everything that needs to be done for everyone's spiritual health. But we sometimes believe that it's our job as leaders to do whatever needs to be done. Honestly, some church members believe that it's your job to do the work of ministry for them. But your job is to help them get involved.

Not only will you burn yourself out and eventually fail to do everything, you're cheating others out of the experience of joining the work—doing what God has for them to do too. Everyone grows through participation and practice. To stick with Paul's body imagery, we don't want to be a local church that neglects certain muscles.

4. The goal is everyone's spiritual health and maturity.

Your calling isn't "to be the leader." Your calling is to help people grow. God put you in this church family for that reason—helping us all become healthy and mature. Look at how Paul concludes this section of teaching on the expectations and purpose of leaders in the church.

Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

Ephesians 4:14–16

WHAT GROWTH MIGHT WE EXPERIENCE IF WE EMBRACE THE CALL OF LEADERSHIP AS EQUIPPING EVERYONE TO JOIN IN MINISTRY?

This can be answered aloud or used to prompt reflection.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus your heart on God's goodness in saving you and using you to lead his church.
- Confess areas of self-reliance, pride, or neglect.
- Thank him for surrounding you with a team and a church family to help you grow in maturity.
- Ask for wisdom in equipping others to join the work of ministry, exercising their own unique gifts.

A Leader's Work

**WHEN YOU THINK OF YOUR WORK,
DO YOU FOCUS MORE ON
WHAT TO DO OR HOW TO DO IT?**

Clarify that there is no right or wrong answer.

We are all wired a little differently. When it comes to work, there are a few main personality types or perspectives toward which we all naturally gravitate. For simplicity, we'll summarize these with the words: *why*, *what*, and *how*.

1. Why? (Big-Picture)

The big-picture answer to why we do what we do is that God has called us to the work of ministry so that others would grow in maturity and experience the fullness of Christ (see Eph. 4:11–16). We want lives to be changed. We want a healthy church that honors God. We don't lead because people need our work. We lead because we know that people need the same gospel that changed our own lives to work in their lives too.

2. What? (Task-Oriented)

What you do depends on your area of leadership (again, see Eph. 4:11). It may even change throughout the year, season, or day. Whether or not you love crossing items off a list, ticking boxes in a checklist, or seeing status changes in calendars or productivity apps, we all have to be mindful of our specific tasks. This comes naturally for some people and takes a lot of disciplined effort for others.

KEY IDEA

Leadership is not just about what gets accomplished, but also how it gets accomplished.

KEY SCRIPTURE:
Colossians 3:12–17

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3. How? (Policies & Procedures)

Today's devotion focuses on how we approach our work as ministry leaders—not because it's more important than the what and why, but because God's Word has a clear checklist for how every leader should conduct his or her work.

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:12-15

Since Paul is writing to all Christians in his letter to the Colossians, these should be considered a baseline of standard policies and procedures for how we should all go about our work, especially as leaders who set an example.

WHICH OF THE CHARACTERISTICS FROM PAUL'S LIST IS A TIMELY REMINDER FOR YOU TODAY?

Use the following checklist to discuss and reflect on what is going on in the hearts and minds of your leaders. You might choose to encourage one another by identifying people who lead by example in the different characteristics.

- compassion
- kindness
- humility
- gentleness
- patience
- forgiveness
- love
- unity
- peace
- thankfulness

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Each of us will find certain things on that list easier or more natural than others. If we're honest with ourselves, we know that none of us perfectly live up to this standard. You may even be tempted to wonder why God would choose to use you as a leader.

But don't forget that Paul identifies you as "chosen ones, holy and dearly loved." You don't do the things on this list to earn his affection. He has chosen to work *in* and *through* you.

Rather than letting it discourage you where you see room for growth in Christlikeness, turn your attention to him.

See how Paul continues:

Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:16–17

Bible reading and study, sermons and podcasts, books and music, there are many ways to keep spiritual truth front and center each day. When the wisdom of God's Word fills your heart and mind, all of your work becomes an act of worship. The characteristics Paul lists begin to overflow from you—even the ones that don't come as naturally. When you do everything for him, your *why*, *what*, and *how* all line up and point to Christ.

HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR FOCUS ON CHRIST SO THAT ALL OF YOUR WORK HONORS HIM?

Invite people to share personal routines and habits, favorite resources, or current lessons that God is teaching them.

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus on God's love for you.
- Confess attitudes and actions that don't honor Christ.
- Thank him for choosing to work in and through you.
- Ask him to fill you with a worshipful spirit so that you will honor Christ in *how* you do *whatever* you do.

A Leader's Time

WHAT TAKES UP MOST OF YOUR TIME?

You can focus specifically on time spent as a leader, or choose to encourage responses for both life in general and for areas of leadership responsibility.

It's been said that we all have the same number of minutes in an hour and the same number of hours in a day. Time is our most limited resource—and therefore our most precious commodity. So what we spend it on should tell us a lot about what we value.

We are drawn to the illusion of “time saving” tips and life hacks, but there truly is no “saving” of time. What we hope is that we will spend less time doing things that we don't want to do in order to have more free time to do whatever we enjoy doing. In reality, most of us keep filling any so-called free time.

“Busy” has replaced “good” for many people as the go-to response to “how are you?” This is especially true for leaders. (At least that was the case pre-COVID19. We'll see if we pick that cultural norm back up in our new rhythms of life.)

In 2019, John Mark Comer's book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* included an all-too-common account of burnout from the unreasonably-normal pace of church leadership and the pressures of ministry “success.” He offered a clarion call to us all, especially as Christian leaders, to recognize the values and beliefs driving our behavior. Do we truly want to be so... “busy?”

KEY IDEA

Leaders spend time wisely.

KEY SCRIPTURE:
Ephesians 5:13–18

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Look at the Apostle Paul's sobering words:

Everything exposed by the light is made visible, for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said:

Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:13–16

Jesus desires for you to be fully alive and awake. Too many Christians have been given spiritual life, but waste each day simply going through the motions, or worse, trying to escape rather than engage. In light of this biblical truth, think about these realities:

1. **I will give an account for how I spend my time.**
2. **Christ already sees what I spend my time doing (or not doing).**
3. **I don't want to sleepwalk through life, missing out on what Christ will do in, through, and all around me.**
4. **There's a wise and unwise way to spend each day.**

DOES YOUR ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION FEEL LIKE A WISE OR UNWISE USE OF TIME?

Assure other leaders that your intent is personal reflection, not job evaluation. Some of the responses may even be related to time with family etc.

You may want to follow up with a question prompting them to find the value even in things that they don't enjoy but take a lot of time.

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Paul continues his wake up call to Christians with instructions that resemble those he gave to the Colossian church about singing and gratitude (see the previous devotion on work) but with an interesting contrast between drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit.

He is tying a previous discussion about being transformed from previous works of darkness verses light (see Eph. 5:8–13) into an application on how we spend our time.

So don't be foolish, but know what the Lord's will is. And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit...

Ephesians 5:17–18

Is the way that you spend your time motivated by a desire to escape the moment (drunk with wine and reckless living) or to engage life (filled by the Spirit)? It could be social media, compliments, registration numbers, etc. Any number of things—even good things and “ministry” related things as a leader—can take your mind off of God’s will for any given moment.

Ultimately, two ways to live are described in many ways throughout these verses:

**asleep or awake,
dead or alive,
in the dark or in the light,
foolish or wise,
unknowing or knowing,
selfish or spiritual,
escaping or engaging.**

**IF YOU HAD A FRESH START, WHAT WOULD YOU
CHOOSE TO SPEND MORE TIME DOING?**

Lead by example, sharing something you would like to better prioritize. Encourage others to share.

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus on the limited amount of time you have in this life.
- Confess areas of selfishness, foolishness, or a desire to escape rather than engage.
- Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Ask for wisdom to live fully alive and awake to God’s work.

A Leader's Relationships

WHO IS YOUR "GO-TO" PERSON?

Encourage leaders to share the names of people they go to for advice and also people within their areas of leadership that they are equipping to handle more responsibilities.

Ken Blanchard, co-author of classics like *The One Minute Manager* and *Lead Like Jesus* said:

"The key to successful leadership is influence, not authority."

Influence requires relationship. A leadership title may give you a position of authority but not a posture of influence.

The people who have influenced your life and the people you are influencing can be visualized like a family tree. While an org chart may show that you technically have authority or a rolesheet may identify you as the leader of a group, whether or not you are truly leading anyone—influencing their lives or equipping them to do the work of ministry—is a different question. Even if it can't always be face-to-face, some sort of meaningful relationship has to exist for you to influence someone.

There has to be trust, not just a title.

Colin Powell, retired four-star general in the United States Army once explained the necessity of a trusting relationship with the people you lead.

KEY IDEA

Leadership is a relationship, not a status.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

1 John 3:16–18, 4:19–21

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“The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.”

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In relation to leadership within the church, the family of God, this translates into love. In order to really lead people you have to love them. This has to be more than a theoretical idea of love. It doesn't mean that you simply think that you know what is best for someone. This has to be a practical, tangible, they-know-it kind of love. Otherwise, you're both just going through empty motions, no real change is occurring, no growth, no maturity, no Christlikeness.

This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.

1 John 3:16-18

That's about as clear as it gets.

- 1. The love of Christ leads us to engage people around us.**
- 2. It doesn't matter if the people in our circle of influence are easy to help or not.**

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE HARD TO LOVE?

Avoid using names if possible, but invite people to share struggles they are having with people in general or specifically in their areas of ministry leadership.

Of Jesus' many disciples, he chose twelve to be apostles, and then three of those had an even closer personal relationship with him: Peter, James, and John. The influence in their lives is

easily noticeable. John, for example, was once known as a “son of thunder” (Mark 3:17). Perhaps he and his brother James were just loud and rowdy fishermen, but he may have also had a hot temper or quickness to judge others; he once asked Jesus if they should call fire down from heaven to destroy an inhospitable Samritan town (see Luke 9:54).

John would later only refer to himself in the Gospel he wrote as “the disciple Jesus loved.” This was not to suggest favoritism, but rather humility. What mattered most about John was that he was loved by Jesus. No matter what his imperfections, quirks, annoyances, or sinful tendencies may have been, John’s life had been influenced by his relationship with Christ. The letters he wrote were also soaked in this idea of love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister.

1 John 4:19–21

One of the most difficult things to do sometimes is to know how to love someone. But a defining characteristic in God’s family tree is choosing to love our brothers and sisters because Christ first loved us and gave his life for us.

HOW WOULD YOUR WORK CHANGE IF YOU KEPT IN MIND THAT TO LEAD SOMEONE MEANS TO LOVE SOMEONE?

Encourage any appropriate conversation or quiet reflection to conclude your time together.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus your heart on the sacrificial love of God.
- Confess feelings of judgment, hatred, or even indifference toward other people.
- Thank Jesus for loving you first.
- Ask for Christlike love as a leader.

A Leader's Words

**ON A SCALE OF 1–10 (1 = LOW, 10 = HIGH)
HOW IMPORTANT ARE WORDS TO
YOUR AREA OF LEADERSHIP?**

Different leadership roles will have varying answers in terms of communication responsibilities.

If the church is a body, then certain leaders are parts related to the mouth. Our words represent the whole church. We speak on behalf of everyone. The first to come to mind may include:

- preachers
- teachers
- group leaders
- worship leaders
- pastors
- elders
- deacons
- directors
- committees
- other “platform” or “out front” roles

Not only do our words represent the church body and everyone who is a part of it, we know that they ultimately represent Jesus Christ who is the head.

The words you speak when acting in these “official” roles of leadership on behalf of the church body carry extra weight. You are communicating our beliefs about the gospel or decisions that we’ve made according to biblical principles.

KEY IDEA

A leader's words will help or hurt a lot of people.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

James 3:1–5

NOTES

The truth is that this doesn't just apply to preachers and teachers. Other leadership roles and forms of communication from the church include:

- emails
- newsletters
- social media posts
- answering & making phone calls
- hallway conversations
- doorway greetings
- ministry meetings
- coffee & lunch appointments
- jokes & comments
- etc.

Like our work as leaders, it's not just what we say but how we say it that matters. Be mindful of things that shape people's interpretation of your words like:

- tone
- timing
- volume
- body language
- eye contact
- ALL CAPS
- punctuation
- context
- etc.

As Christians, we all represent Christ, the church, and the gospel message with our words. Always. Other people (Christians and non-Christians alike) will come to conclusions about Christ, our church, and the gospel based on the things we say (or don't say) even in so-called "normal" conversation that is not directly related to "ministry." All of our words carry power and should be handled with care.

HOW CAN YOUR WORDS BE MORE HELPFUL?

Conclude your time sharing examples of how to positively use the power of words as leaders representing Christ, the church, and the gospel.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus your heart on the privilege and responsibility of knowing and representing Christ.
- Confess careless or hurtful words.
- Thank God for his grace and power.
- Ask for discernment in all of your words and communication.

A Leader's Vision

WHAT SORTS OF THINGS MUST LEADERS SEE THAT OTHER PEOPLE MAY NOT NOTICE?

A variety of answers are possible. There are no wrong answers. The objective is to get people thinking about their "vision."

Ministry leaders see all kinds of things. This can be a proverbial blessing and curse. We see the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The Good

The "inside" and "up close" perspective that you have to God's activity in people's lives is a special privilege and true joy.

The Bad and the Ugly

Witnessing the disappointing failures and drama can also be a heavy burden to bear at times.

As a leader, you don't just see the way things are, you have to see what they can be too.

This isn't just for your own sanity, but for the benefit of the people you lead.

Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

Proverbs 29:18

KEY IDEA

Leaders see the present and the future.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

Proverbs 29:18

NOTES

Some translations say “revelation” instead of “prophetic vision.” God’s people need leaders who will point them to the truth of his Word—leaders who lead by example in trusting God’s wisdom over our own human understanding.

While God’s wisdom may feel like restraints and restrictions, he always knows and wants what is best for us. (Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden being warned about the forbidden fruit.)

“Prophetic” is typically used in two ways:

- 1. Speaking truth (especially hard truth)**
- 2. Seeing the future (especially in relation to God)**

For most leaders, those two understandings still apply, even if not in the more dramatic or miraculous sense of prophets throughout biblical history.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH’S “VISION” FOR PEOPLE OR FOR YOUR MINISTRY AREA?

You may want to share your church or ministry area’s “vision statement” or something comparable.

Help leaders see how they are used by God to point people in the direction of truth and blessing, away from sin and judgment.

Remember that the job of a leader is to lead.

It sounds obvious, right? But that means more than just knowing the final destination. It even means more than having a plan on how to get there.

It means knowing where you are right now in order to help people every step along the way to where they need to be in the future.

For example: If someone wanted to literally and physically visit your church, think about what you would say.

If your immediate response was an address, that’s an end goal—an arrival point. This is essential, but it’s not everything.

You need to rightly identify the end goal and provide instructions on how to get there.

Honestly, a lot of us don’t even have the bandwidth, time, and energy to even identify these two key things metaphorically in our ministries. Leaders are often barely hanging on to their sanity, doing their best to keep up with the pace of life and ministry, making it up the best they can as they go.

As a leader, you need to know where you’re headed. There should be clear expectations and indicators when people have arrived, so-to-speak.

So let’s back up and see what it means to be a “visionary” leader.

1. You “see” where people or ministries are right now.
2. You “see” where people or ministries are headed if they continue on their current path.
3. You “see” where people or ministries need to be to experience God’s best.
4. You “speak” the truth, even if it’s not popular in a way that will help people or ministries know how to move from their current reality to a better future reality.

WHAT WOULD YOUR GREATEST HOPE BE AS A LEADER?

Help team members see that their God-given hopes and dreams that line up with the truth of God’s Word may be a one way he is leading the church or ministry into a brighter future.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus on God’s wisdom.
- Confess your own short-sightedness.
- Thank God for including you in his plan to lead the church or ministry into this new season or “future.”
- Ask for wisdom and clarity in seeing what is and what can be, while navigating the good, the bad, and the ugly things we see as leaders.

A Leader's Responsibility

WHAT IS YOUR KEY AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY?

This is a “roll call” of sorts. It may also serve as a helpful reminder or point of clarification for leaders to identify a primary area of responsibility.

As leaders, we all have a key area of responsibility. There are areas of overlap. Ultimately, we know that our collective efforts have the same goal: healthy growth for the whole church body. (See previous devotions on calling and work.)

There are two great temptations to guard your heart against when it comes to areas of responsibility and leadership:

1. Comparison to other members

The first great temptation is believing that leadership responsibilities mean greater value or significance as part of the body. It's easy to say that leaders aren't more important than other members, but it can also be easy to start believing in your heart and mind that leaders are somehow closer to God.

This can be especially tricky because other church members often believe that leaders are “super Christians.” We have to intentionally avoid being propped up on a pedestal with unrealistic and unhealthy expectations of leadership.

KEY IDEA

Leaders have unique gifts to use for the good of others.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

Romans 12:3–21

NOTES

2. Comparison to other leaders

Secondly, we have to avoid comparing ourselves and our areas of responsibility to other leaders within the church. While certain jobs have more visible responsibilities or perceived perks and privileges, we're all on the same team. We all "win" together when each player is in their position working toward the same goal.

It can't be overstated since the Apostle Paul constantly wrote to different churches about the same thing:

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

Romans 12:3–8

HOW DOES VIEWING YOUR AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY AS A GIFT FROM GOD AFFECT THE WAY YOU VIEW LEADERSHIP?

Invite people to share responses.

Follow up by asking how an area of leadership is "grace" both to the leader and to the church body.

By God's grace, not of our own inherent worth, he has positioned each person within the body to lead in ways that will be a blessing to them and to others.

In that way, leadership responsibilities are the proverbial “gift that keeps on giving.” God continually reveals his grace in and through us as we exercise the abilities he has given to us.

Ministry is tough. It can be tiring. Pandemics, natural disasters, economic recessions, and the general difficulties of loving and leading people affected by sin present new challenges each day. In addition to all of these outside factors, we wrestle with our own temptations.

Listen to Paul’s concluding instructions for Christian leaders, making note of specific words of encouragement or conviction from the Lord:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone... Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

Romans 12:9–21

HOW CAN YOUR LEADERSHIP BE AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR FAITH, CONQUERING EVIL WITH GOOD?

Encourage brainstorming in addition to soul-searching. Responses may include ways that exercising faith in leadership can overcome evil in our own hearts in addition to ways it can serve the good of others.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus your heart on the numerous blessings of God.
- Confess areas of hypocrisy, pride, or jealousy.
- Thank God for entrusting you with gifts of grace as a mutual blessing for yourself and others.
- Ask for a humble and eager heart to overcome evil with good in your area of leadership.

A Leader's Creativity

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF CREATIVE? WHY OR WHY NOT?

Allow leaders to discuss their views on creativity.

In his 2019 book *Adorning the Dark: Thoughts on Community, Calling, and the Mystery of Making*, author and singer-songwriter Andrew Peterson proposes that the label “creative” or “creatives” can be misleading. We know what is typically meant by the term or title but the implied distinction is that some people are and others aren’t creative. All people created in the image and likeness of our Creator have creative abilities.

“Since we were made to glorify God, worship happens when someone is doing exactly what he or she was made to do.”

Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden to cultivate it—to take what he had made and encourage healthy growth and fruitfulness. The same is true for each of us today. God has put us in areas of responsibility and given us circles of influence. He expects us to make the most of our time and our opportunities.

Simply put:

Leadership is an inherently “creative” responsibility.

It’s your job to see what “is” and what “can be.”
(See the devotion on vision.)

KEY IDEA

Leaders solve problems even if they need to find a new way to reach their goal.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

Luke 5:17–20

NOTES

Although he specializes in leading “creative teams” in the usual sense for both churches and businesses, Todd Henry, founder of accidentalcreative.com (and guest on Episode 3 of The Church Fuel Podcast) offers a definition that applies to us all, regardless of our involvement in ministry areas or personality types considered:

“Creativity is problem-solving.”

With that in mind, put yourself into the following situation from the life and ministry of Jesus.

On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord’s power to heal was in him. Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him. Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus.

Luke 5:17–19

These friends epitomized creativity and leadership.

- 1. They saw a need.**
- 2. They took responsibility.**
- 3. They worked together.**
- 4. They faced an obstacle.**
- 5. They worked with what they had.**
- 6. They tried a different approach (literally).**

NOTES

WHAT CHALLENGE ARE YOU FACING?

Focus this part of the discussion on identifying a challenge. Later you will focus on creative solutions as a team.

Ultimately, the creative problem-solving of these men had an even greater impact on their friend's life than they had anticipated. Look at the result:

Seeing their faith [Jesus] said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Luke 5:20

That's always the goal, but it's a problem that only Jesus can solve. People need Jesus to forgive their sin and heal their brokenness. You can't do that, no matter how hard you try to "fix" someone. Your job is to lead them to the feet of Jesus.

Whatever it takes, don't let anything discourage or prevent you from helping someone encounter the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

Think back over the story one more time, prayerfully consider how God might use you to find a creative solution to a problem that other people may see as hopeless or impossible.

HOW CAN WE WORK TOGETHER TO OVERCOME AN OBSTACLE TO MINISTRY?

Brainstorm creative solutions and ways to recruit extra help, in meeting ministry needs.

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus your heart on feeling the pain and needs of others.
- Confess any lack of effort or faith in solving a problem that seems impossible.
- Thank God for his willingness to forgive and to heal.
- Ask for creativity and courage in facing challenges to ministry.

A Leader's Resilience



WHAT IS CAUSING YOU THE MOST STRESS OR REQUIRING THE MOST ENERGY RIGHT NOW?

Invite leaders to share openly. Lead by example in sharing ways that you are facing stress. Don't share yet what you are doing to deal with stress. Focus on giving permission to acknowledge the pressures of ministry.

Ministry leadership is a lot more taxing than most people realize. Best-selling author Thom Rainer once identified "Seven Myths About a Pastor's Workweek." See if these myths sound familiar, even for leadership roles other than senior pastor:

Myth #1: The pastor has a short workweek.

Myth #2: Because of the flexible schedule, a pastor has a lot of uninterrupted family time.

Myth #3: The pastor is able to spend most of the week in sermon preparation.

Myth #4: Pastors are accountable to no one for their workweek.

Myth #5: Pastors can take vacations at any time.

Myth #6: The pastor's workweek is predictable and routine.

Myth #7: The pastor's workweek is low stress compared to others.

KEY IDEA

Leaders have to trust God's timing for results.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

Galatians 6:9–10

NOTES

WHAT OTHER MISCONCEPTIONS WOULD YOU ADD TO THIS LIST RELATED TO YOUR OWN AREA OF LEADERSHIP?

The objective is not to merely vent or to start a gripe session. The aim is to remind staff and even volunteers that they are understood and not alone with stress that is often misunderstood.

One of many good reasons that farming imagery is often used in the Bible to describe the work of ministry is that it is hard work! While the labor is rewarding—few things are greater than witnessing the power of God to bring new life and fruitfulness in individuals, families, churches, and communities.

We can't produce that fruit in our own skill, no matter how creative we may be. Ultimately we have to wait on the Lord to bring about the fruit of his Spirit. We work and work, getting our hands dirty in the messy lives of hurting people who need Jesus. We plant and water seeds of hope and truth, sharing the gospel and loving even the hardest to love people. And we wait.

We wait for God's perfect timing to see faith take root and spiritual fruit to take shape...

**love,
joy,
peace,
patience,
kindness,
goodness,
faithfulness,
gentleness,
and self-control
(see Galatians 5:22).**

Shortly after describing the fruit of the Spirit to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul began to wrap up his letter with a word of encouragement and a promise, acknowledging the tiring nature of ministry.

Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.

Galatians 6:9–10

There are times that feel like even the tiniest fruit will never come, let alone a harvest. But God promises us through his Word that if we don't give up, we will reap at the proper time.

Notice that Paul says that even while we may not be seeing results in one area, we can keep our eyes open for opportunities to see God working in other places. He is always at work.

If you're facing burn out, remember that you're not alone. Let someone know. A good farmer knows that there are seasons and cycles of work and rest. Don't push things (including yourself) past healthy limits. Ask for help. It's OK to rest. Don't wear yourself out trying to force results.

Paul said "let us work for the good of all." We're in this together. We are a team. We're a body with many parts. We're a family full of brothers and sisters in Christ who both *need* help and who *can* help.

HOW CAN WE SPECIFICALLY PRAY FOR AND ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TO NOT GIVE UP?

Use this as a time of specific prayer for one another. Pray for your leaders by name with specific requests for resilience.

Invite leaders to pray specifically for your resilience too.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus on the refreshing presence of God's Spirit.
- Confess areas of self-reliance or that risk burning out.
- Thank God for his perfect timing.
- Ask for renewed strength, enthusiasm, and eyes to see new needs in your church family.

A Leader's Planning

WHAT IS YOUR STRENGTH OR WEAKNESS WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING PLANS?

Remind your team of God's wisdom in giving different leaders to churches with complementary gifts. Each leader has unique strengths and weaknesses, including the ways we make and carry out plans.

Not only was an entire book written about why checklists are important, Atul Gawande's *The Checklist Manifesto* was a New York Times bestseller! Having a clear plan and sticking to it as often as possible is a big deal. Gawande, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and leader of the World Health Organization's Safe Surgery Saves Lives program, argues in his book that it's literally a matter of life and death.

[Gawande writes] Here then is our situation at the start of the twenty-first century: We have accumulated stupendous know-how. We have put it in the hands of some of the most highly trained, highly skilled, and hardworking people in our society. And, with it, they have indeed accomplished extraordinary things. Nonetheless, that know-how is often unmanageable. Avoidable failures are common and persistent, not to mention demoralizing and frustrating, across many fields—from medicine to finance, business to government.

KEY IDEA

Leadership is more about the plan than the person.

KEY SCRIPTURE:

Luke 14:28–30

NOTES

Gawande's best-selling conclusion is simply that no matter how good we are at anything, we're foolish to not have a plan.

Even at the highest levels of professional competency, sticking to a plan should be the norm even though unforeseen circumstances will inevitably arise that require creative problem solving and the flexibility to change plans.

Some people are natural planners. They love checklists and get a happy rush of adrenaline from a spreadsheet or task matrix. Others are more big-picture thinkers and less detail-oriented (see the previous devotions on work and time). But whether we see the big picture or each tiny detail, we're all expected to make and follow plans.

According to Jesus, this is just common sense:

For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man started to build and wasn't able to finish.'

Luke 14:28–30

WHEN HAVE YOU GOTTEN INTO A MESS OR AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T HAVE A GOOD PLAN?

As usual, lead by example, sharing your own embarrassing or messy situation that was your own fault.

Encourage others to laugh at their mistakes, but not to make light of them.

Wisdom is gained through experience and often that means learning from our mistakes, not just our successes.

Jesus said that one of the biggest mistakes we could make would be to start a major project without having a vision and plan for the end.

Jesus continues with another example of common sense:

Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

Luke 14:31–32

Though Jesus’ point would ultimately be about “counting the cost” of being his disciple, he drew from the common sense principles of wise planning that we can now unpack as church leaders.

- 1. Have a plan for finishing what you start.**
- 2. A poor plan (or no plan) is poor leadership.**
- 3. As a leader, your reputation (and the church’s) is related to your ability to make and complete a good plan.**
- 4. Anticipate an outcome—even if it’s not what you want.**
- 5. If one plan won’t work, proactively try another one.**
- 6. Discipleship and ministry are eternally more significant than building towers or waging war... so have a plan.**

DO YOU HAVE A PLAN FOR WHATEVER YOU’RE LEADING NEXT?

This final question may be more reflective and rhetorical.

Follow up the final thought by inviting leaders to reach out to you or someone else for help in making or evaluating plans for current or future ministry opportunities.

NOTES

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus on the great privilege of following Jesus as his disciple.
- Confess ways that you’ve been underprepared or even arrogant by not taking seriously the responsibility of leadership preparation.
- Thank God that even though you want to make wise plans, ultimately salvation and spiritual fruit are not dependent upon your abilities.
- Ask for wisdom in making and completing plans.

A Leader's Evaluation

WHAT GETS MEASURED IN YOUR AREA OF MINISTRY?

Allow leaders to share different metrics within their respective areas of ministry. Point out the difference between quantity and quality (both are important measures).

In his classic book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey wrote that anyone (especially leaders) should:

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

He went on to add:

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

One of the most overlooked dynamics of leadership is evaluation or feedback.

The Book of Proverbs, a collection of wisdom sayings, includes these words for consideration:

*Know well the condition of your flock,
and pay attention to your herds,
for wealth is not forever;
not even a crown lasts for all time.*

Proverbs 27:23–24

KEY IDEA

Leadership requires reflection.

KEY SCRIPTURES:

Proverbs 27:23–24

NOTES

WHY DO YOU COUNT OR EVALUATE THE THINGS THAT YOU DO IN YOUR AREA OF MINISTRY?

Refer leaders back to their answers to the opening question.

Similar to making plans while still trusting God and knowing that we are ultimately dependent upon him for the results, there are a few points to consider when it comes to “data” or ministry numbers:

1. Numbers aren’t everything, but they are important.

Ministry is not a business, but we absolutely want to be good stewards of everything the Lord entrusts to us.

2. We count people because people count.

It’s among the oldest cliches in ministry, but it’s true. Ultimately if lives aren’t being changed, then we’re not fulfilling the mission Jesus gave us. He commissioned us to “go therefore and make disciples” not to “get together and be disciples” (See Matthew 28:18–20).

3. We want to know our people well so that we can love and lead our people well.

Leadership is about leading people to grow in Christlikeness. We want to see people become more and more like Jesus. To know people—to have meaningful relationships—requires listening to people.

4. We want to make the most of our time by doing what is helpful for others.

Life is short and uncertain. Time is our most precious commodity. Let’s not waste time with things that aren’t truly helping others.

5. We will stand before our King one day.

What greater joy than to faithfully serve Jesus until we finally rest in his presence? (See Matthew 25:14–30.)

NOTES

There's a fascinating story in Genesis 30 of a wise shepherd, blessed by God, who paid close attention to his sheep. Jacob, who would be renamed Israel, was preparing to leave his uncle, Laban. The men had an agreement about which sheep Jacob could take with him. Jacob carefully evaluated the flocks and adjusted his plans according to what he saw, knowing that his time was limited. As a result, Jacob's flock not only grew healthy and strong, but also multiplied and grew more numerous.

That is what we desire.

As leaders—shepherds—caring for our flock, no matter how large or small, we want to pay close attention so that our circle of influence will grow in maturity and in spiritual health. We want to see what is helpful in that process so that more and more people will become part of God's family.

We can pay attention, evaluate what helps, and trust the Lord to bless our church.

WHAT NEEDS EVALUATING?

After allowing responses, conclude with an invitation to help leaders evaluate effectiveness in ministry.

Encourage them with what you see "working" and "growing" in their areas of ministry leadership.

PRAYER PROMPTS

- Focus your heart on Christ, the Good Shepherd.
- Confess ways that you get so busy as a leader that you don't listen to or look at whether or not what you're doing is actually helping anyone.
- Thank God for the growth that you do see, both in quantity and quality of spiritual life.
- Ask for wisdom, humility, and favor to recognize what will help your church grow healthier and multiply.