



# OVERCOMING THE DARK SIDE OF LEADERSHIP

HOW TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE LEADER BY CONFRONTING POTENTIAL FAILURE

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## 6 BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THE BOOK

1. Every leader suffers from some degree of personal dysfunction varying from extremely mild to extremely acute.
2. Personal dysfunction, in one form or another, can often serve as the driving force behind an individual's desire to achieve success as a leader.
3. Many leaders are not aware of the dark side of their personalities and the personal dysfunctions that drive them.
4. The personal characteristics that drive individuals to succeed and lead often have a shadow side that can cripple them once they become leaders and very often causes significant failure. This dynamic has been labeled the “paradox of personal dysfunction in leadership,” in this book.
5. Learning about their own dark side and the dysfunctions that have created it can enable leaders to address those areas and prevent, or at least mitigate, the potential negative side effects to their exercise of leadership.
6. Scripture has much to say about the dark side of human personality and the motivations that drive us to achieve, which can be helpful to leaders in their efforts to understand themselves and overcome those areas of their personalities that might threaten their effectiveness as leaders.

# THE COMPULSIVE LEADER

- Compulsive in a leadership context describes the need to maintain absolute order.
- A Biblical example of a compulsive leader is Moses.
- Moses was in charge of around 3 million people and in order to solve disputes, people would stand around Moses for a period of at least 12 hours until he would settle their problem.
- In addition to the control issue, it would seem that Moses was subject to occasional public eruptions of anger (Numbers 20:1-13).
- Moses though could see that his compulsive need to control was unhealthy for him or the people (Exodus 18:17-18).
- Compulsive spiritual leaders feel the need to be in complete control of their organization in every minute detail. It often shows up in the pursuit of excellence in ministry because it can turn into perfectionism.

# THE NARCISSISTIC LEADER

- The biblical example of a narcissistic leader is Solomon.
  - He was a man obsessed with his own image. Because of the legacy of his father, King David, Solomon would always be looking over his shoulder; simply succeeding would never be enough.
  - The result of his massive, self-indulgent projects was a temporary feeling of satisfaction with the image he created (Eccl. 2:9-10). To fund his desires though, he taxed the people to the point of economic exhaustion and violated three specific prohibitions for whoever would serve as king (Deut. 17:16-17).
- For the narcissistic leader, such as Solomon, the world revolves on the axis of self, and all other people and issues closely orbit them as they get caught in the strong gravitational pull of the narcissist's self-absorption.
- Narcissistic leaders in ministry often use those they lead to enhance their own image and improve the way they feel.

# THE PARANOID LEADER

- King Saul is a prime example of a paranoid leader.
- The primary service that God had planned for Saul was the liberation of Israel from the oppression of the Philistines.
  - A key thing to remember is that there is always parameters and restrictions on leadership.
  - When Saul stepped outside those parameters, he justified his actions as necessary and refused to admit any wrongdoing (1 Samuel 13:11-13). It would be the first step down the path of destruction.
  - Shortly after his failure, Samuel announced God had removed the mantle of leadership from Saul and had chosen a new king. After this, Saul began the rapid descent into obsessive paranoia.
  - David began complicating Saul's life even further, leading Saul to attempt to murder David on several occasions.
  - Regardless of what he tried, Saul could not quell his irrational fears and suspicions and it led to his own breakdown and tragic failure.
- Much more common in church ministry is the senior pastor who refuses to allow an associate to preach for fear the congregation might like the associate's preaching better than his own.

# THE CODEPENDENT LEADER

- Samson was a man with a need to please. He is a great example of a codependent leader.
- Samson's trouble in leadership was of his own making. He continually engaged in behavior that was self-destructive, a trait of the codependent.
- He knew he shouldn't get involved with three Philistine women and the three of them led to his ultimate fall – the Timnite woman he took as a wife, the harlot at Gaza, and Delilah (Judg. 14:1-4; 16:1-20).
  - One Biblical commentator states “in spite of his great strength, he was not strong enough to control his own impulses...” Samson had a need to please others and it was very hard for him to disappoint anyone.
- A common manifestation among codependent spiritual leaders is their failure to confront and deal with inappropriate behaviors within the church.

## THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE LEADER

- Jonah was an angry man and a passive aggressive leader. He walked away from the task God assigned him and walked straight into a storm, a storm of God's discipline.
- In Jonah's life, we see a resistance to God's demand to perform assigned tasks, bursts of sadness and anger, short-lived periods of contrition and sorrow for his actions, impulsive behavior, and a general negativity.
  - Like Jonah, passive aggressive leaders have a tendency to resist demands to adequately perform tasks. Their resistance is most often through behaviors such as procrastination, dawdling, forgetfulness, and intentional inefficiency.
- Many passive aggressive leaders in ministry find it difficult to set goals and implement plans for the future since these only provide the possibility for failure.

# LEARNING FROM LINCOLN

- Though overcoming one's dark side is never an easy task, leaders are expected to exercise a higher degree of self-management.
- Lincoln's sense of inferiority and lack of self-worth drive him to achieve a level of success and influence that would provide the salve for his painful childhood wounds.
- Unlike many leaders, Lincoln was painfully aware of his dark side and took proactive steps to prevent it from sabotaging his leadership. Armed with this self knowledge, he implemented a strategy of personal management that enabled him to achieve greatness where many other leaders would have stumbled and fallen.
  - The self-management techniques allowed him to release inner pressure before it exploded into a significant leadership failure.
  - He made it a practice to never display his anger in public. Instead, he would express it in a letter, read it periodically until the anger was gone, and eventually dispose of it.
  - He made conscious efforts to avoid conflict. Not every disagreement or issue was worth the energy required in conflict.

## 5 STEPS TO OVERCOMING YOUR DARK SIDE

1. Acknowledge your dark side – Admit your dark side exists and understand the shape it has taken in your life. Acknowledge its existence and God's empowering work through it (2 Cor. 12:9-10).
2. Examine the past – Recall events that have shaped your life and left an indelible mark. Identify the feelings generated within that still motivate you as a leader today. Gaining freedom involves extending forgiveness in some form.
3. Resist the poison of expectations – Expectations are a two-edged sword, propelling you to achieve or weighing you down in failure. Unrealistic ones produce friction and pressure that lead to burnout.
4. Practice progressive self-knowledge – Overcoming the dark side requires regular exposure to the mirror of Scripture, as it will provide you with the most accurate self-knowledge available (James 1:22-25).
5. Understand your identity in Christ – We must always remember that our greatest source of worth as leaders should come from the knowledge that we are known by God and declared righteous in Christ. In his letters to the church of Corinth, Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).