

My Personal Philosophy of Life and Ministry

**Person in Ministry
Dr. Terry Wardle
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By: Christopher J. Kinner

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My Personal Philosophy of Life and Ministry

I. Introduction

The nature of being called to full-time ministry is found in "a gift of the spirit to the church, and is an office involving both the inward call of God and the commission of the church" (Segler, 59). The nature of this call is one of loving service to God and the building up of His people through having a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. As Paul wrote to instruct Timothy on the status of the leaders of his day in 1 Timothy 1:3-7, we can see the condition of the church leadership today.

"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm."

In his book, Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People are Leaving the Church, Dr. William D. Hendricks interviews a series of ex-church members to gather their reasons for why they have gone. The common stories he discovers are of leaders who failed to be worthy of trust and did not encourage a longing for community. There was repeated boredom with (dead) church services and a craving for truth and reality. He also found people who were annoyed by the red herring of busyness that was reflected through their unfulfilled desires to express spiritual gifts (Hendricks, 260). These are just a few of the crucial aspects of ministry that Church leaders need to respond to today. These alarming trends in ministry have burnt out leaders such as Dr. Terry Wardle.

"I was trying to manage an extremely demanding schedule. It was the result of a very unhealthy philosophy that I had adopted, believing it was far better to burn out than rust out for the Lord" (Wardle, 14).

God's direction in my call to full-time pastoral ministry has been deafening to me at times. No matter what defenses, compromises or miss-steps I seem to take, God's response to me has always been, "Speak the word in my house, and shepherd my flock." Knowing this call to be true through experiencing the inward call of God and the encouragement of the local church, I now turn my attention to the importance of living a life that will promote God's work and purpose in the church in the most productive way possible.

When my wife and I went to receive Pastoral counseling prior to our marriage, the pastor shared that his wife had an affair at one time and he felt it was his fault for not properly meeting her needs. We were shocked but polite and left that session never to return to him for counseling. This is one of many situations where church leaders have disappointed me personally. Now I search the core of my faith and ask how I can be transformed by God to be used effectively in His ministry.

II. Personal Mission Statement

A. My Statement

To have growing, healthy and dynamic relationships with God, myself and others. As I mature through these relationships, a deeper understanding of how to live out the transformed Christian life will be a part of my continual journey. This process will allow the ministry of Christ to be evident in my life.

B. Explanation

This mission statement fully embraces the four journeys discussed at length by Dr. Terry Wardle. The Upward Journey being submission to God and a desire to grow

closer to Him. The inward journey as a desire to know yourself and examine your story as you grow in Christ. The outward journey of primary relationships and friendships where we are supported and mentored in this process. Concluding with the Forward Journey that is the outpouring of ministry through a life that is being transformed into the image of Christ. In the following paragraphs I will describe each of the four journeys and cite authors who describe factors of each of these journeys in their works.

1. The upward Journey: A dynamic relationship with God.

In Marianne Williamson's book, The Gift of Change, she concludes the opening chapter entitled "the challenge to grow" with this observation.

"To some this might feel like the period of a great end, perhaps even at time Armageddon, but in fact this is the time of a great beginning. It is time to die to who we used to be and to become instead who we are capable of being. That is the gift that awaits us now: The chance to become who we really are. And that is the miracle: the gift of change" (Williamson, 12).

1 Corinthians 14:49-52 says it this way:

"And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Submitting ourselves to the transforming power of God is at the core of the upward journey and as we see here does not mark the end of our journey, but only the beginning. Dallas Willard encourages us by stating that "nothing is more central to the practical life of the Christian than the confidence of God's individual dealings with each person" (Hearing God, Willard, 22). This understanding forms a crucial step as we undertake the upward journey and enter into a relationship with God. This relationship in

Biblical terms is always presented as a friendship or family tie and not impersonal or mechanical. God's personal encounters with Abraham, Moses and Paul demonstrate that God addressed them where they were and in the midst of what they were doing. God's change in course for men such as these was personal. The upward journey should include accepting the council of scripture and living in a regular and intelligible plan for having a relationship with God (Hearing God, Willard, 198).

2. The inward journey: Knowing Myself

The act of turning myself over to the guiding and shaping hand of God requires me to know what and who I am turning over. A conversation is made rich if both parties know what they are contributing to the discussion.

"When we set out to hear God's voice, we do not listen as though it will come from somewhere above us or in the room around us. It comes from within the heart, the dwelling place of God. Now most of us haven't been trained in this, and it's going to take a little practice, tuning in, to all that's going on in there" (Eldredge, 105).

Proverbs 4:20-23 says it this way:

"My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

The wellspring of our lives is the Holy Spirit that now resides inside those who have begun the upward journey. When anger, fear, hatred and other sins appear in our lives, we need to see these evils and reject them. As Paul teaches us "it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me" (Romans 7:17). Therefore we are no longer to live lives that accept living sin, but lives that say "For in my inner being I delight in God's law" (Romans 7:22). This requires us to examine how we live and what we do,

where we have been and where we are going. Every Christian must take this inward journey. The good news is what we will find inside us is a redeemed heart.

"The vine is Christ, I am the branch. The Holy Spirit is the sap that runs from the vine to the branch. The branch lives, grows, and bears fruit, not by struggles and effort but simply by abiding" (Stanley, 59).

Thus the inward journey provides a relationship with our true new selves. As a people who are no longer bound by sin, but rather a people freed by grace and love made good at the core through the act of abiding in God. Galatians 2:20 says:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Knowing who we truly are helps us to break free from the sinful ways of the old and now dead person we used to be. This is the next step in our journey to be transformed.

3. The Outward Journey: Growing Relationships with Others.

"It is by his marriage that he bears witness to Christ love for the world, and in his marriage that he experiences that love. His marriage is the sacramental center from which grace radiates out into every department of his life...it should be emphasized that for the married Christian, even and especially married love enters into his contemplation, and this, as a matter of fact, gives it a special character" (Merton, 140).

The first and most central human relationship I have is to my wife. She is the one whom I am closest to and hence she is the first to notice the impact of my upward and inward journeys. By this relationship, other earthly relationships in my life are often shaped and accepted or refused. When I spend time in reflection and contemplation, she is always a factor in my deepest thoughts.

Next are my close friendships, John Eldredge calls these "Fellowships of the Heart" (Eldredge, 185). Acts 4:32 paints this picture, "All the believers were one in heart

and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had." To pursue relationships of this caliber one must,

"Be careful not to let your job take the place of authentic friendships - money, position, or power can't sustain your soul" (Jakes, 179).

This thinking calls us to stay close to 'God's friends' and to get alongside those who walk with God and us in life. This intentional outward action of true and deep Godly relationships leads us to the forward journey.

4. The Forward Journey: The Ministry of Christ

"The only way to spread one's influence wide is to learn to go deep" (Williamson, 8).

"You are a letter from Christ" Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:3, "written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts." Verse 2 states, "you are a letter that is known and read by everyone." Paul says, "we are God's love letter to the world." "We were set apart for a purpose - to communicate his glory to a lost and dying world" (Weaver, 83).

With these exhortations in mind, the ministry of Christ moves beyond the mechanical programs of the church to the miraculous change that impacts those who have been transformed by the power of Christ's work in their lives. Sharing the transformational journey that I am on with others and encouraging the beginning of their journey becomes the hallmark of truly deep ministry. Ministry becomes an outpouring of the deep and meaningful impact of my relationship with God. True transformation into the likeness of Christ creates a ministry that is guided by God and impacts the hearts of those around me. It is a ministry that goes deep and displays the character of Christ. This is the heart of the forward journey.

III. Core Values / Non-Negotiables

A. Introduction

These four journeys are vital to personal growth and the growth of God's Church. Because of this I have undertaken the task of outlining ten core values that constitute non-negotiable aspects of my life as a minister of the gospel. Each value effectively supports the continuation of the four journeys in my life.

These ten core values and non-negotiables will be grouped into three categories for ease of examination. The categories have been taken from Tim Kitchens' book, After Shock, where he utilizes them to stress to the church three areas that a person in Christian leadership must be encouraged in. They are Humility, Accountability and Teachability. In each area there are non-negotiables that I see as imperative to my involvement in ministry. A final core value that clearly establishes the need for this process will conclude this list.

B. Core Values

1. Humility.

a) **A Dynamic and Healthy Relationship with God** – As I learn to listen to God and be changed by Him through His word and in following the direction of the Holy Spirit, I gain trust in His strength and yield to His leadership. I must maintain a healthy and growing relationship with God.

"Our personal needs for security and significance can be genuinely and fully met only in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Crabb, 34). This foundational principle of the Christian life is widely agreed upon by Christians everywhere. However, in the fast paced society that we live in how often do the daily devotional times fill slots in our day planners and stand as a scheduled appointment rather than being an active and

constant relationship with a close friend? "Knowing and loving God is our greatest privilege, and being known and loved is God's greatest pleasure" (Warren, 87). Rick Warren writes this in his well known book, The Purpose Driven Life. He then proceeds to encourage us to follow the example of Brother Lawrence and to worship God through the common tasks of life. In taking the time to worship God when mowing the lawn, taking out the trash or washing dishes, we are going on a special spiritual retreat and connecting with God as we do the simple things of life that He has created us to do.

A rich relationship with God, as in any relationship, flows not from the quality of time spent with Him but rather the quantity of time. "Personal growth is like investing. It's not your timing. It's your time put in" (Maxwell, 119). James 4:8a says, "Come near to God and he will come near to you."

I know a man who spent a lot of time as a small child with a close friend who had a speech impediment. In time this man developed the same impediment and had to undergo speech therapy. He was no longer allowed to see his friend as this would only exasperate the situation. This man still struggles with this impediment today even though he was not born with this affliction!

We need the character of God in our lives, to read His word and spend time with Him enables us to be transformed into a people that have His characteristics. This is a blessing and time must be spent with God as a close friend and family member, not simply as a scheduled event. Presenting myself to God through personal reflection and introspection and seeing the vision of the man God has redeemed me to be are crucial aspects of my continuing spiritual life. I will at no point put this relationship at risk for any reason.

b) A Dynamic and Healthy Relationship with my Spouse – A relationship where my spouse and I submit to one another as servants and trust each others feedback as God reshapes our marriage into the union that it is intended to be. I must have a healthy relationship with my spouse.

"The union of a man and his wife in nuptial love is a sacred and symbolic act, the very nature of which signifies the mystery of the union of God and man in Christ" (Merton, 140).

My relationship to my wife is of crucial importance. Being committed to ministering to my spouse's needs is a primary vehicle by which I display the love and ministry of Christ for His church. Though we must turn individually to God in complete dependence for our personal needs, we also must turn to each other in our mutual commitment to support each other as we seek God's purposes for our lives (Crabb, 45).

To fulfill the purposes listed here, the communication level between my spouse and I needs to be very high and our friendship needs to be one that is based in an intentional direction of growth. I will at no point put this relationship at risk.

c) Dynamic and Healthy relationships with others - I must have healthy and growing relationships with others in the community.

"I know of no more potent killer than isolation. There is no more destructive influence on physical and mental health than the isolation of you from me and us from them" (Swindoll, 29).

The challenge to move out of self-centered isolation is found in Romans 12:5, "so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." Belonging to each other calls us to a higher level of concern for each other as brothers and sisters. Learning to know others in a deep and meaningful way and care for their hurts and needs is a matter of growth and maturity for Christians. "Seeking to understand others more than being understood" (Murren, 158) is a characteristic that stands out as a valuable way to getting to the fourth level of communication (sharing feelings and

intimate thoughts). Being intentional regarding forming healthy relationships with others also means dealing with conflict correctly. Neither avoiding, fighting, compromise or surrender will do, only looking to resolve conflict through seeking God's direction in the situation is appropriate (Swihart, 34).

Helping others in the church and community personally and acting in ways that minister and serve others are areas that I need to grow in. I know a Pastor who excels in these skills. He has taught me much about the value of developing these community skills; he has been a valuable mentor to me. I will value others and care for them.

2. Accountability.

a) Intentional Spiritual Formation – I must have healthy and growing relationships with others in a small group setting.

There are two aspects to this need. First, a core group of close Christian brothers and sisters who I can pray with and seek direction from, who are not involved in my local ministry. Secondly, a group within my ministry context that I am discipling in the modeling of spiritual formation. Others are valued in this process and unity and accountability promoted.

Rev. Rich Nathan of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Columbus regularly has a small group meet in his house. Utilizing a topical title to bring a small group together such as "former ministers" he will meet with this spiritual formation group for 8-12 months at a time. This group time consists of a time of worship and sharing followed by prayer and concluded in a brief time of sharing from a devotional reading. At the conclusion of this group Rev. Nathan would encourage new leaders to take over the leading of the spiritual formation group and move it into their home. He would then select a new topic that would bring a new group to the next round of this process. It was

an interesting process to observe and I remain thankful for his mentoring in this endeavor.

Realizing that small group based discipleship is an intentional process, I will seek out a small group of spiritual brothers and sisters to support me in ministry and whom I can support as well as creating spiritual formation groups for the benefit of others.

b) Team Based Ministry – Working with others in a decentralized ministry setting. Sharing the work of the church with others in the community. Plans for ministry preparation and growth are shared and revised, with a goal of submitting ideas and plans for the review of others, and setting benchmarks for success and accurate expectations for the ministry of the church. Others are valued in this process and unity and accountability promoted among church leadership.

Although the apostle Paul performed many functions such as prophet, teacher, evangelist and pastor; there is a necessity to the plurality of leadership in the church. Many of Paul's letters were sent to leaders that he served with and had trained. The church has continued to realize the importance of specialization in various ministries to be performed. For me personally, I am not gifted in teaching children or leading worship, but I have found I am quite good at working with those who lead these vital church ministries.

Independence in our culture has been equated with maturity (Bugbee, 85) and because of this many pastors have felt pressure to ignore God's design for us to serve Him as a body. Romans 12:5 says, "so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." The gifts based ministry is continually seeking ways to promote others. One thing I have learned in my life is to refute this lie,

"Real men are rugged, unemotional, performance oriented individualists who are always in control. Big boys don't cry" (McDowell, 82).

A decentralized team based ministry keeps the body of Christ working and growing together as we seek God. The personal and corporate accountability required of the church makes this a non-negotiable form of ministry.

c) Intention to achieve Excellence - Actively reviewing all goals and seeking to develop methods of gathering feedback as I/we (personally-corporately) serve God through improving the work of the church. A continuing process in which one can build trust and progress is promoted. Others are valued in this process and unity and accountability supported.

Rarely is the dynamic of excellence addressed in the ecumenical setting. Many may view excellence as a pathway to success; however, I am utilizing this term to demonstrate a dynamic for personal and corporate growth. In his book, Rediscovering the Soul of Leadership Eugene B. Habecker defines excellence in these terms;

"While success bases our worth on a comparison with others. Excellence gauges our value by measuring us against our own potential"
(Habecker, 95).

God's word also encourages us to reach our full potential in ministry, in fact because of the work of Christ we have been fully enabled to pursue excellence.

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

Often the church skips the review process that I believe is crucial in asking the question; "How can we improve?" or "How can we better serve God next time?" A secular book named The Leadership Challenge lists several things that can be done to improve performance within an organization. They include collaboration, developing corporate goals (corporate meaning the group working together to produce shared outcomes) and supporting reciprocity (Kouzes, 152). Each of these factors are crucial to

The Body of the Church. Another secular book named A Complaint is a Gift has this to say regarding the reception of feedback:

"You choose to take the criticism positively and thank the person for pointing this out to you. You thank him/her for taking an interest in your work, apologize if necessary, and correct the mistake if possible"

(Barlow, 135).

Truly treasuring ministry means providing our best for those that are seeking God. A non-negotiable for me in ministry is to do the work of the Lord to the best of our ability, to receive feedback and make improvements as needed.

3. Teachability.

a) Valuing Flexibility – The willingness to change as we follow God's will and achieve the growth that leads us to excellence. Both personally and corporately God requires us to stay pliable. Continually learning to work as a body in a gift based ministry demands flexibility.

The creative mind can fully comprehend Jesus' teaching "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26) and the flexibility to see as Paul saw that God "is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Doug Murren, in his book Leader Shift states, "Often growth simply can't occur without pain. New ways of thinking do not emerge without pain." This author outlines three times in the life of a church when flexibility becomes essential to assisting the church as it deals with paradigm shifts. They are numerical growth, the changing needs of the community and new opportunities for ministry. He states that "When the church as a whole begins to accept the idea that the only unchanging fact of life is change." Thus it is a necessity that any ministry I serve in allows for flexibility and change as growth happens and God directs.

"Experiment. Be flexible and open to God's unfolding purpose for you" (Holcomb, 54).

b) Valuing Relevance – Valuing the needs of people, this is the “So what?” factor that I and the church need to answer to. Either individually, community wide, nationally or internationally, this is a priority for the work of the church to be done. I will be intentional regarding the application of God's word to our world today.

The work of the prophet is to be relevant connecting how we really live with the vision for how we are called to live by God. This is the heart of relevance, the "thus saith the Lord" factor. But why? Because people matter to God. Consider the following quote.

"No one can succeed by doing a task in isolation. Success is defined by the relationships that develop between those involved in accomplishing the task, making the task itself secondary" (Hershey, 31).

Or the following scripture,

"Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven'"

(Matthew 16:17-19).

Jesus' gift to those who have faith is the ability to be relevant both on the spiritual plane and earthly world. This relevance is crucial to the work of the church today and goes beyond accomplishing tasks that are relevant **to** church members. It means accomplishing tasks that are relevant **in** church members! I must be involved with ministry that is relevant to the spiritual and physical needs of people.

c) Valuing Grace – Creating an environment where questions and complaints can be shared without the fear of reprisal. The allowance of failures as growth is sought, participating in a ministry of redemption and not one of judgment. Residing in a place where actively learning from God regarding His love and forgiveness is stressed.

At the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ is forgiveness. Christ died for our sins and I have experienced His forgiveness. I continue to realize the truth of 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." As one who is forgiven I must also forgive. As God's word teaches us "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). This level of forgiveness needs to be infinite as Jesus instructed the disciples (Matt 18). Finally grace means more than just forgiveness, a grace filled ministry brings a sense of unity and purpose to the Church.

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Rom. 15:5-7)

The grace filled ministry is a Biblical directive and I must serve and participate in such an environment.

4. Summary: The Wounded Healer

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

The core of the nine non-negotiables above are summarized in this definition. The heart of who I am is as one who must humbly seek to serve God, my spouse and those in my sphere of influence. One who must be accountable to a spiritual counsel of co-travelers, co-workers and regularly undertake the review of my journey as I strive for excellence. Finally I must remain pliable to be continually shaped, I must maintain relevant to those around me whom I serve and I must value the grace of God at all costs. As a wounded healer these are all invaluable to me for my journey to continue. Who I

am facilitates what I do and I must serve in a place that accepts the truth about my continuing condition and supports me in my core values.

C. Specific Goals

To assist in this process I have created a Goals worksheet. I have chosen five of my core values to work on for the time being and constructed this worksheet for use with my wife and accountability partner. This worksheet is designed to be simple and efficient, so that I will follow through.

Goals Worksheet				
	Low	High	Comments	Goals
1) Relationship with God				Year 1-5 -spend time with God each day- expand prayers for others.
-Journaling	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
-Prayer	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
-Introspection/Devotions	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
-Proximity/walk	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
2) Relationship with Spouse				YR 1 1 vacation 1 marriage seminar Regular prayer time YR 2 2 vacations 1 book or seminar Regular worship and prayer time YR 5 2 getaways 1 vacation Regular devotionals, worship and prayer times
-Communication	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
-Support/Encouragement	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
-Devotions	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
-Vacations	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
3) Others				
-Service to community?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			YR 1 help one day at soup kitchen or other mission YR 2 help 4 times this year as volunteer.
-spending time with	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			YR 3 Take others with me as I volunteer regularly.
-Praying for others	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
-Witnessing to others	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			

4) Intentional Spiritual Formation			YR 1 attend a sm grp with my wife
-In small group?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10		YR 2 begin our own home group
-Growth in group?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10		
-Support/encouragement?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10		YR 5 Have spun off 2 small groups
-Life impact?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10		
5) Excellence			
-Feedback?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10		
-Flexible/Pliable?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10		
-Giving/accepting grace?	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10		
<i>How should I update this form?</i>			

D. Necessary Resources: Faith, Hope and Love

I worked for several years for the Christian companies David C. Cook and Scripture Press. With each company I consulted churches on their Sunday school and other children's education programs. Through speaking with hundreds of Christian education consultants, pastors and Sunday school teachers both locally and at training seminars and workshops, I found an interesting fact to be true. A teacher with proper training and expensive curriculum in the largest and most appropriately furnished classroom can make absolutely no contribution to the spiritual impact of his/her pupils' lives. Likewise a layperson with absolutely no training or curriculum and only makeshift space can create a spiritual atmosphere that impacts the hearts and minds of both children and others in their sphere of influence for generations to come! More than once Pastors and church leaders that I talked with would share with me their marvel at a teacher who was "amazingly creative" with no resources, or deserving of better, because of the good work they had done so far. "If they had better resources they could do even more" a Pastor would say. Several times I inquired regarding the teacher's name so that I could

contact him/her to get some 'tips' to add to my workshop material. In each case I will never forget their answers. Each 'gifted teacher' was first and foremost humble and surprised by my call, generally embarrassed by their Pastor's or CE Director's praise of their work. They would insist that they really hadn't done anything special. "I am not really that creative; God just lines everything up for me." I heard this statement many times. As I talked with these 'gifted teachers' I found that they did two things, and these two things are found in Matthew 22:37-39.

"Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Clearly loving God and loving others are resources of the highest order for those in ministry. People that love God and love those that they teach pray for God to meet needs and then accept God's gifts for ministry and honor Him with the results. I am not suggesting that leaders were not assisted in their teaching from acquiring better materials. What I am saying is that if you do not begin with the most important resources of ministry the other dressings are not necessary. As I Corinthians 12:31-13:1 states,

"But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

Therefore love is the most important resource for life that I can identify. When all is stripped away - budgets, family cars, vacations and possessions; what is left? Paul tells us that there are three things left when we are mature and doing the Lords' work.

"When I was a child, I talked like a child; I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 Corinthians 13:11-13

I have had the privilege in my young life to have elderly friends who served God with their lives. Rev. Lester Beckley who was in his 90's when I mowed his lawn as a high school student. He would pray with me each time I visited him and shared with me many of his handwritten sermons. His devotional writings were and are a treasure to me. He would tell me he had not been a very skilled orator, nor had his church been large or fancy. However, I could see that his life had certainly been filled with Faith, Hope and Love and this saint, though he has long since passed, encourages me today with the simplicity of his life. He had learned what was important and that was God and people and not things. Love is the greatest single resource that I could possess for ministry. Without love we will not be able to reflect who God is and we will not have a kingdom impact (Bugbee, 167).

As I seek to live faithfully as a man of God I seek to "understand that the most important business in the world is the people business." As Bill Hybels instructs us in his book Becoming a Contagious Christian, "Watch out!" when people realize this "they're going to live differently, pray differently, love differently, work differently, give differently, and serve differently, because they will be preoccupied with people and their needs" (Hybels, 213).

IV. Potential Personal Obstacles

The first six potential personal obstacles that I will list here are components that George Barna lists as "vision killers" in his book The Power of Vision (Barna, 120-129). I use the terms here as I feel it best provides a list of obstacles that have stood in the way

of the person God has called me to be. I have arranged the list in such a way that they appear in a greatest to least impact order. The definitions and explanations that I utilize for each obstacle differ from Barna's description, and I have added a seventh obstacle that in many ways becomes a product of the first six. However, I cannot definitively say that this obstacle would not be evident without the first six, so it is being included as an obstacle that God continues to transform as He works in my life.

A. Fear

Dr. H. Norman Wright in his book Raising Emotionally Healthy Kids asserts that "Children are not born with fear. They learn to be fearful" (Wright, 128). I am fearful of many things, flying for instance. I can barely hold it together during takeoff. I hate heights. It's almost as my mother is there telling me that I am going to fall! I have a fear of being abandoned by those that are closest to me. My separation anxiety hits whenever I arrive home before my wife arrives there. "What if she's never coming home?" I sometimes think, as my heart races and my brow breaks into a sweat. Other fears include, not being good enough, offending others (a constant worry) and even failing God and His Church.

B. Stereotypes

Dr. David Seamands says this in his famous book, Putting Away Childish Things,

"We live in such bondage to other people because we want them to think we are spiritual. This leads to neurosis in the Christian life and to introspection and slavery" (Seamands, 127).

Stereotypes short-cut the truth by assuming false information about others and ourselves, God does not see the surface of a person, He sees the heart. God alone knows

who loves Him and who does not. Stereotypes regarding who I am hinder me from growth. They keep us from loving and being truly loved for who we are. This can severely limit personal growth.

C. Complacency

In many situations I decide to overlook and act on things that could be important. This can lead me to lethargy and a habit of saying, "I'll handle that later". This overall lack of passion is not how I want to live. The ability to overlook opportunities of value and to undervalue important things causes me to live in ways that are displeasing to God. Even at times taking my relationship with God for granted. I need to give God all that I have everyday, and be actively involved in seeing His vision.

D. Fatigue

Details and unfinished tasks cause me fatigue. Many times I hold onto things that I should share with others. I need to share my burdens and work with others to share tasks that lie outside of my gift set. The inability to trust others also leads me to the realization that I do not fully trust God and rest "in Him". A quiet walk and stepping away to gain clarity in tough situations are helpful. Securing vacation time for myself alone as well as for my wife and I are also needed.

E. Short-Term Thinking

There have been many times I have found myself applying quick fixes and putting out fires, rather than planning ahead. Many times I only get by today instead of planning appropriately and looking to long term solutions. The reality is what I do today matters in an eternal sense to God and I should live this way.

F. Tradition

It is easy to criticize the church for this error, but as they say we can be “creatures of habit”. I find myself saying to God, "My family has always done it this way”, “this is how I have always lived." Or "this is how I want to live, because this is how our society lives." To mature I know that God wants to make changes in my habits and traditions.

G. Negative Attitude

“Since your thinking has a direct bearing on your performance, your thinking must be based on sound input” (Ziglar, 117)

When I feel defeated, focused in finding only problems and begin to believe the worst about myself or others. I am not experiencing God's vision, He sees me as washed in the blood of His son, clothed in righteousness and transformed for the purpose of winning victories in His name.

V. Accountability

My wife proofreads all of my written work and cares deeply for my needs. She is my first line of accountability. Her stubbornness has been set on seeing the goodness of God in me and her love is only rivaled by my grandmother, who has always seen me as her favorite, her Christopher. Through their love I get a glimpse at God’s pure love for me and I am reminded that I am certainly accountable to God.

My dear friend Scott Harris is my next confidant and spiritual brother. He has never said an angry word to me in the years that I have known him and when I talk with him I can sense our shared love for God. He has never expected anything from me but my best and never seemed to see the negatives in me that I feel hold me back. He is a

friend in the best sense and my accountability partner. He has consulted me in the writing of this paper as has my wife and for their assistance I am indebted.

To each of them I will submit a copy of this work and ask that they review it and help me to follow through on annual reviews and discussions of my Specific Goals sheet. Over time I may increase my frame of accountability, but starting small is a first step in what I feel is a very vulnerable position. These are people that are safe for me to confide in, people that I trust and over time I hope that they pray for me that I will be able to trust others to know me at this level.

VI. On writing this paper

This assignment was an important part of my walk with God during the past three weeks. I pulled and reread many books from my personal library while God helped me to sift through my personal experiences with ministry and ministers. Some memories were very painful, such as my failed pre-marital counseling. Other memories tugged at my heart in positive ways. I found myself continually wondering why some of my experiences in ministry were so good while others failed completely. How do I vocalize these concepts and feelings into a cohesive paper? Distilling years of anger with others and disappointment in myself into a systematic summary of what I believe to be true regarding who I am and what I believe ministry is.

I sought input from others that know me as I wrote out core values and personal weaknesses. I sought scripture and trusted the writings of those that have had experience in these matters. Finally I utilized my memory of two pastors that I worked with and for as a youth ministry intern in college.

One ministry was rich and vital. Many came to know the Lord and growth occurred both in depth and breadth. I also grew from this experience. This pastor and I prayed regularly together. Rev. Miller always greeted me with a smile, always encouraged me and showered me with grace. He also was my advocate at board meetings; he encouraged flexibility as group numbers grew and needs changed. For my part I spent 1-2 hours a day in prayer for group members and regularly met with my “top three” students for prayer and spiritual formation. God opened doors and I volunteered at a youth shelter that ministered to battered children. Through community involvement, many more youth came to the church. At the end of the summer the church decided to hire a full time youth minister and build a youth ministry center. In the years that followed Rev. Miller was called elsewhere. He once shared with me that he knew he was being called away because the church would not place money aside to assist me with my continuing education, or for his. I had no idea how much he had truly been my advocate.

The second pastor Rev. Fore offered me a staff position saying “I’m not sure about this, but you come highly recommended.” Later when I asked him when we could meet for prayer during the week he said “You have your ministry and I have mine.” This ministry took place during the college semester and being busy I took no time to pray or get involved in the community outside the church. At meetings I had no advocate, there was no flexibility or grace, just a rundown of numbers and comparisons to last years numbers and goals. After a year I felt defeated and useless. I resigned quietly, although the core group of youth, that had only marginally grown, seemed sad, I knew that the vital ministry that God had wanted there had not occurred. Pastor Fore encouraged me as I left that I was doing the right thing. He has since left the ministry.

As I wrote this paper I began to realize what really happened in these ministries. I both receive God's grace for the poor job I did and also now realize that the environment of the second church was not right for me to be in. I also thank God for Rev. Miller, I had no idea how much he was teaching me about ministry through his Christian character!

Moving forward I will be intentional regarding the ministry setting that I am involved in. The experiences that I have shared in the writing of this document have not been experiences that I have fully examined in the past, while it has been difficult to share them I am relieved to have been provided the tools to discuss and understand them. While the production of this work has not changed who I am in ministry, it has shown me who I want to be in ministry.

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