LEAD EMPOWERED

A Practical Guide to Spirit-Empowered Life and Leadership

"Where am I leading from?"

Produced by ThriveLife Foundation
thrivelifefoundation.com

About This Guide

Lead Empowered is a practical guide for Christian leaders who want to live and lead with greater dependence on the Holy Spirit in every part of life.

It isn't a course you need to complete. You don't need to start at the beginning and work through every topic. Instead, use it to help answer a simple question:

WHAT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR ME TO WORK ON RIGHT NOW?

Leadership affects more than what you do at work or in ministry. It affects your time, attention, relationships, emotions, energy, decisions, and life with God. Start with the Check-In, or go directly to a topic that fits what's happening. Each Practice includes a short Scripture and reading, reflection questions, something practical to do, and one next step to try.

Use it on your own, with someone you trust, or with a team. Then come back whenever another topic becomes useful.

> Need something for your team tomorrow? You don't need to complete the Check-In first. Go directly to Choose a Topic. Pick what fits. Read the Scripture and short section together. Talk through the questions. Do the Practice. Choose one thing to try. Pray. That's enough.

Living and Leading with God

> *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.”*
>
> — John 15:4

Christian leadership can easily become focused on what we do for God. Prepare. Teach. Lead. Solve problems. Care for people. Make decisions. Build things. Develop others.

All of those things matter. But Jesus begins somewhere else. Remain in Me.

A branch doesn’t produce life by trying harder. It bears fruit because it remains connected to the vine. That doesn’t mean effort doesn’t matter. Christian leaders still work hard. We prepare, learn, practice, make decisions, develop skills, take responsibility, and do difficult things.

But we aren’t meant to do those things independently of God.

YOU WERE NEVER MEANT TO GENERATE ALL THE POWER YOURSELF.

The Holy Spirit isn’t simply someone we ask to help us accomplish more. God invites us to live with Him. That includes the obviously spiritual parts of life: prayer, Scripture, worship, discernment, and ministry. But it also includes everything else: your emotions, sleep, body, schedule, phone, relationships, conflict, limits, decisions, leadership, and the people you go home to.

Spirit-empowered living doesn’t mean trying to make every ordinary activity sound spiritual. It means learning to live every part of life with God—depending on Him, paying attention to what’s happening in us and around us, and responding to His leading.

Where Am I Leading From?

There is one question worth coming back to throughout this guide:

WHERE AM I LEADING FROM?

Leadership tends to reveal what we're relying on. When things are going well, that can be difficult to notice. Pressure makes it clearer.

When something goes wrong, what happens? Do you immediately work harder? Take control? Worry? Avoid? Try to keep everyone happy? Keep going when you need to stop? Try to solve everything yourself?

None of those reactions automatically tells you something terrible about yourself. They simply give you information: This is what I tend to do when things get difficult. That creates an opportunity to respond differently.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit doesn't mean becoming passive. It means bringing God into what you're actually facing.

You can pray and make the decision. Trust God and prepare well. Ask for help and take responsibility. Rest and work hard. Listen and lead. Delegate and remain accountable.

The question isn't whether you are doing something. It's increasingly learning to do what is yours to do with God rather than as though everything depends on you.

Three Ways to Use Lead Empowered

On Your Own

Read the Scripture and short section. Answer the reflection questions honestly. Do the Practice using something real. Choose one thing to try this week. Pray.

With Someone

Use the guide with a friend, mentor, pastor, or someone you trust. Read it. Talk about it. Do the Practice. Decide what you want to try. Come back later if useful.

With a Team

Choose a topic that fits. Read or summarize the short section. Use the Together questions. Do the Practice. Choose next steps. Pray. Your job isn't to fix anyone.

> Some conversations belong outside a team setting. If something involves significant mental health concerns, abuse, safety, serious relationship problems, employment issues, or another situation requiring specialized help, use appropriate professional or organizational support.

Where to Start

Something already stands out

Maybe you already know what would be useful. Your schedule is too full. You're having trouble sleeping. There's a conversation you need to have. You've been worrying about something. You need to delegate more.

Don't take an assessment to tell you what you already know. Go to Choose a Topic and start there.

You're not sure

Use the Lead Empowered Check-In. It isn't a test. There is no ideal score. Its purpose is simply to help you notice what's going well, what might need some attention, and what would be most useful to work on right now.

Then choose one place to start.

Contents

START HERE

About This Guide

Living and Leading with God

Where Am I Leading From?

Three Ways to Use Lead Empowered

Where to Start

CHECK-IN

Lead Empowered Check-In

What Stood Out?

Choose a Topic

PART 01 — LEAD CONNECTED

1 Prayer and Connection with God

2 Scripture

3 Listening and Discernment

4 Trust and Control

PART 02 — LEAD FROM THE INSIDE OUT

5 Stress and Emotions

6 Fear and Anxiety

7 Identity and Approval

8 Failure and Criticism

9 Knowing Your Limits

PART 03 — LEAD WITH CAPACITY

10 Sleep and Energy

11 Taking Care of Your Body

12 Rest and Sabbath

13 Schedule and Capacity

14 Technology and Attention

PART 04 — LEAD WITH PEOPLE

15 Friendship and Support

16 People Closest to You

17 Being Present with People

18 Conflict and Repair

19 Asking for Help

PART 05 — LEAD OTHERS WELL

20 Leading Under Pressure

21 Decision-Making

22 Control and Delegation

23 Difficult Conversations

24 Developing Other Leaders

25 How You Measure Success

LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Quick Tools

Reflection Rhythm

What I’m Working On

How Did It Go?

Facilitator Quick Guide

Keep Leading

Lead Empowered Check-In

What would be useful to work on right now?

This isn't a test, and there isn't a perfect score. Answer based on the last few weeks, not what you normally believe about yourself or what you hope is true. Don't spend too long deciding.

1 = Rarely true 2 = Sometimes true 3 = Often true 4 = Consistently true N/A

LEAD CONNECTED

1. Prayer and Connection with God
I spend time talking with God that isn't mainly about preparing, leading, or solving something.

1 2 3 4 N/A

2. Scripture
I read Scripture for myself, not only when I'm preparing something or looking for something to help someone else.

1 2 3 4 N/A

3. Listening and Discernment
When I have an important decision to make, I make room to pray and consider what God may be asking before I decide.

1 2 3 4 N/A

4. Trust and Control
After I've done what I reasonably can about something, I can usually leave the outcome alone instead of continuing to work it over in my head.

1 2 3 4 N/A

LEAD FROM THE INSIDE OUT

5. Stress and Emotions
I usually notice when stress is affecting my mood, patience, concentration, or reactions before it has been going on for a long time.

1 2 3 4 N/A

6. Fear and Anxiety
When I keep worrying about something, I can usually tell whether there's something useful to do or whether I'm just going over it again.

1 2 3 4 N/A

7. Identity and Approval
I can make a reasonable decision even when I know someone may be disappointed or disagree with me.

1 2 3 4 N/A

8. Failure and Criticism
When I make a mistake or receive criticism, I can usually figure out what I need to own or learn without replaying it for a long time afterward.

1 2 3 4 N/A

9. Knowing Your Limits
When I don't realistically have the time or energy for something, I adjust the expectation, timeline, or plan instead of assuming I should somehow fit it in.

1 2 3 4 N/A

LEAD WITH CAPACITY

10. Sleep and Energy
Most weeks, I give myself a reasonable opportunity to get the sleep I need rather than regularly cutting sleep short.

1 2 3 4 N/A

11. Taking Care of Your Body
Basic things that help me physically—like eating reasonably, moving, or taking care of health needs—usually still happen when life gets busy.

1 2 3 4 N/A

12. Rest and Sabbath
I have regular times when I actually stop working rather than continuing to check, think about, or deal with work throughout my time off.

1 2 3 4 N/A

13. Schedule and Capacity
My normal schedule has enough room that one unexpected problem doesn't immediately make the rest of my week difficult to manage.

1 2 3 4 N/A

14. Technology and Attention
I can usually put my phone or other technology away when I want to focus on a person, task, prayer, or rest.

1 2 3 4 N/A

LEAD WITH PEOPLE

15. Friendship and Support
I have at least one person I would actually contact if I were having a difficult week and needed to talk honestly.

1 2 3 4 N/A

16. People Closest to You
The people closest to me regularly get time and attention that isn't whatever happens to be left after work or ministry.

1 2 3 4 N/A

17. Being Present with People
In important conversations, I can usually listen without checking something, preparing my response, or trying to solve the problem too quickly.

1 2 3 4 N/A

18. Conflict and Repair
When something important happens between me and another person, I usually address it directly rather than letting it sit.

1 2 3 4 N/A

19. Asking for Help
When help would genuinely be useful, I usually ask before the situation becomes urgent.

1 2 3 4 N/A

LEAD OTHERS WELL

20. Leading Under Pressure
When pressure rises, I usually notice changes in how I'm responding before they start driving my decisions.

1 2 3 4 N/A

21. Decision-Making
When I have enough information to make a decision, I can usually make it rather than continuing to delay.

1 2 3 4 N/A

22. Control and Delegation
When I give someone responsibility, I'm usually clear about what they can decide without coming back to me.

1 2 3 4 N/A

23. Difficult Conversations
When something important needs to be addressed with someone I lead, I usually have the conversation rather than repeatedly putting it off.

1 2 3 4 N/A

24. Developing Other Leaders

I can name someone I'm intentionally helping become more capable by giving them opportunities to practice, decide, lead, or take greater responsibility.

1 2 3 4 N/A

25. How You Measure Success

When results aren't what I hoped for, I can evaluate what happened without letting the result alone determine whether I believe I led well.

1 2 3 4 N/A

Don't add them up. There is no Lead Empowered total score. A lower answer doesn't mean you're failing, and a higher answer doesn't mean you've mastered something. Your answers are simply information about what's happening right now.

What Stood Out?

What surprised me?

What seems to be affecting me the most?

Where would it be useful to start? Choose one.

Turn to Choose a Topic.

Choose a Topic

You don't need to work through these in order. Look for something that sounds close to what's actually happening.

LEAD CONNECTED

Prayer and Connection with God	Time with God has become rushed, inconsistent, or mostly connected to preparing and leading.
Scripture	Most of your Bible reading is for teaching, preparing, or helping other people.
Listening and Discernment	You're facing a decision and want to make room to seek God before deciding.
Trust and Control	Something important is outside your control, but you're spending a lot of energy trying to manage the outcome.

LEAD FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Stress and Emotions	Stress has been showing up in your reactions, concentration, mood, or patience.
Fear and Anxiety	Your mind keeps returning to the same worries even when there isn't anything more to do.
Identity and Approval	Someone's reaction, disappointment, or opinion is having a lot of influence on what you do.
Failure and Criticism	A mistake, disappointment, or something someone said has been difficult to shake.
Knowing Your Limits	You're expecting more from yourself than your available time or energy allows.

LEAD WITH CAPACITY

Sleep and Energy	You're regularly tired enough that it's affecting how you think, feel, relate, or work.
Taking Care of Your Body	Basic things like movement, meals, or health needs keep getting pushed aside.
Rest and Sabbath	It's difficult to actually stop working, or work keeps following you into your time off.
Schedule and Capacity	Your weeks keep getting too full, and there isn't much room when something unexpected happens.
Technology and Attention	Your phone, messages, email, or other technology are getting more of your attention than you want.

LEAD WITH PEOPLE

Friendship and Support	You have people around you, but not many people you would actually call when things are difficult.
People Closest to You	Work or ministry has been getting more of your attention than you want with the people closest to you.
Being Present with People	You're physically with people but often thinking about work, checking something, or moving ahead.

Conflict and Repair	Something has happened between you and another person that needs to be addressed.
Asking for Help	You're handling something yourself even though another person could genuinely help.

LEAD OTHERS WELL

Leading Under Pressure	There is a lot coming at you, and pressure is changing how you respond.
Decision-Making	You have an important decision that needs to move forward.
Control and Delegation	You've given someone responsibility, but you're still more involved than you need to be.
Difficult Conversations	Something needs to be addressed, but the conversation would be easier to avoid.
Developing Other Leaders	You want to become more intentional about helping someone else grow.
How You Measure Success	Results, comparison, recognition, or disappointment have been affecting how you feel about how you're doing.

More than one fits? That's normal. Choose the conversation that would be most useful right now. You can come back for another topic later.

PART 01

LEAD CONNECTED

Don't let leadership replace your life with God.

PRACTICE 1

Prayer and Connection with God

Before you lead for God, be with God.

BIG IDEA

Time with God is not preparation for leadership. It is the relationship leadership flows from.

REAL LIFE

Your calendar is full of things you need to prepare. A message to write. A meeting to plan. A person who needs your attention. When you open your Bible, your mind is already looking for something useful—an illustration, a verse for someone, an insight for the team. Prayer has become a briefing. You talk to God mostly about what needs to happen next.

> *"Remain in me, as I also remain in you."*
>
> — John 15:4

THE INVITATION

Jesus describes life with Him as a branch remaining connected to a vine. The branch doesn't produce life by trying harder. It receives what it needs by staying connected.

That picture matters for leaders because time with God can gradually become part of the work. We pray about the meeting. Read Scripture for the message. Ask God for help with the problem.

Those are good things. But a relationship with God can become surprisingly focused on what we do for God rather than being with God.

Jesus' invitation is simpler: Remain with Me. Prayer doesn't always need an agenda. You don't always need an insight, answer, or plan. Sometimes time with God is simply time with God.

BEFORE YOU LEAD FOR GOD, BE WITH GOD.

FIND THE GAP

How much of your time with God lately has been connected to preparing, leading, or solving something?

When do you spend time with God when you don't need anything for someone else?

What would change if your time with God didn't need to produce anything?

PRACTICE

SPEND 5 MINUTES WITHOUT PREPARING ANYTHING

Set aside five minutes. Don't prepare a message. Don't work through your task list. Don't try to solve a leadership problem. Put away distractions. Then simply talk with God.

> You might begin with: "God, here's what's actually going on with me today…"

Then leave some quiet. You don't need to manufacture an experience. Notice what comes to mind and bring that honestly to God.

THIS WEEK

> Choose one time to spend with God when you aren't preparing or producing anything. Even ten minutes counts. Protect the time and see what happens.

TOGETHER

- What makes time with God start feeling like part of the job?
- What helps keep prayer personal during busy periods?
- What makes it difficult to simply slow down and be with God?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you become more attentive to God—not only when you need direction or help, but in ordinary life with Him.

GO DEEPER

John 15:1–11, Psalm 27:4, Psalm 63:1–8, Luke 5:16

PRACTICE 2

Scripture

Read it for yourself, not just for the next thing you're preparing.

BIG IDEA

When Scripture becomes only a tool for ministry, it stops being food for your soul.

REAL LIFE

You're reading through a passage and something catches your attention. But before you've even finished the paragraph, your mind has already moved: That's a good illustration. I could use this in the message. Someone on my team needs to hear this. You close the Bible having prepared something but having received nothing.

> *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."*
>
> — Psalm 119:105

THE INVITATION

When Scripture is part of your work, it's easy to read with someone else in mind.

There is nothing wrong with preparing well or teaching Scripture. But sometimes we need to read God's Word without immediately turning it into something for someone else.

Instead of asking, "How could I use this?" ask, "What do I need to hear?"

You don't need a complicated reading plan. Read slowly enough to notice what gets your attention. Stay with it. Think about it. Talk with God about it. Then ask whether there is anything you need to do with what you've read.

ASK "WHAT DO I NEED TO HEAR?" BEFORE "HOW COULD I USE THIS?"

FIND THE GAP

When do you currently read Scripture just for yourself?

How quickly does your mind move from reading to preparing something for someone else?

PRACTICE

READ WITHOUT PREPARING

Choose a short passage. Read it once without taking notes. Read it again slowly. Then answer only two questions:

What stands out to me?

Is there anything I need to do with it?

That's enough. Don't turn it into a teaching outline.

THIS WEEK

> Come back to the same short passage at least twice before moving on to something new. Notice whether anything becomes clearer when you stay with it.

TOGETHER

- What helps Scripture stay personal when reading it is also part of your work?
- What can make Bible reading start feeling like another task?
- What helps you slow down enough to actually pay attention?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand Scripture, receive it personally, and respond to what God is showing you.

GO DEEPER

Psalm 1:1–3, Psalm 119:97–105, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16–17

PRACTICE 3

Listening and Discernment

Slow down enough to hear before you decide.

BIG IDEA

Discernment doesn't always produce certainty. Sometimes it gives you enough clarity to take the next faithful step.

REAL LIFE

You have a decision to make. People have opinions. The timeline is short. Part of you wants to move. Part of you isn't sure. You keep going over the options, but the urgency around you is louder than anything you're hearing from God. So you decide quickly—or you keep delaying because nothing feels certain enough.

> *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God."*
>
> — James 1:5

THE INVITATION

Not every decision comes with an obvious biblical answer. Should we start this? Stop this? Say yes? Wait? Have the conversation now? Change direction?

Christian discernment isn't about manufacturing certainty or waiting for a special feeling. God has given us Scripture, prayer, wisdom, other people, experience, and the ability to think carefully. The Holy Spirit can work through all of those things.

Sometimes the first step is simply slowing down enough to separate God's leading from the other voices competing for your attention: fear, urgency, other people's expectations, your own preferences, or the desire to keep everyone happy.

You may still not feel completely certain afterward. Discernment doesn't always produce certainty. Sometimes it gives you enough clarity to take the next faithful step.

SLOW DOWN. SEPARATE GOD'S LEADING FROM THE NOISE.

FIND THE GAP

What decision is taking up the most attention for you right now?

What is making it difficult to know what to do?

What voice is loudest—God, fear, urgency, or someone else's opinion?

PRACTICE

BRING ONE REAL DECISION TO GOD

What am I deciding?

What does Scripture already make clear?

What do I sense may be wise or faithful?

What fear, pressure, preference, or person's reaction could be affecting me?

Whose perspective would help?

Sit quietly with what you've written. Then ask: "God, is there anything I'm missing or resisting?" Don't force an answer.

THIS WEEK

> Identify your next faithful step. That might be getting information, asking someone for perspective, waiting, having a conversation, or making the decision. Take that step.

TOGETHER

- What can make it difficult to hear God clearly when a decision feels urgent?
- How can Scripture, prayer, wise people, and good judgment work together?
- How do you know when it's time to stop waiting and take a step?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom, freedom from unnecessary pressure, and willingness to follow God's leading even when you don't have complete certainty.

GO DEEPER

Proverbs 3:5–6, James 1:5–8, Romans 8:14–16, John 10:27

PRACTICE 4

Trust and Control

Do what's yours. Release what isn't.

BIG IDEA

Responsibility and control are not the same thing.

REAL LIFE

You've done everything you can about a situation. The conversation happened. The decision was made. The email was sent. But your mind keeps going back. What if they respond badly? What if it doesn't work? You replay the scenarios. Check for a response. Think through another angle. The issue isn't that you don't trust God. It's that your hands won't let go.

> *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*
>
> — 1 Peter 5:7

THE INVITATION

Leadership comes with real responsibility. But responsibility and control aren't the same thing.

You can prepare for a difficult conversation. You can't control the other person's response. You can make a thoughtful decision. You can't guarantee the outcome. You can lead someone well. You can't make their choices for them.

Problems begin when we keep working on the second category as though it belongs in the first. We replay. Check again. Try another angle.

Trusting God isn't passive. You still take responsibility for what is yours. The important distinction is: What is mine to do? What is not mine to control?

RESPONSIBILITY IS YOURS. OUTCOMES AREN'T.

FIND THE GAP

What outcome are you spending the most energy trying to control right now?

Is there actually something more you need to do—or are you going over it again?

PRACTICE

DIVIDE THE RESPONSIBILITY

Choose one real situation that's taking up a lot of your attention.

PART 02

LEAD FROM THE INSIDE OUT

What happens inside you eventually leads with you.

PRACTICE 5

Stress and Emotions

Notice what's happening inside before it makes the next decision for you.

BIG IDEA

Emotions are messengers, not managers. They give you information—not instructions.

REAL LIFE

A small problem gets a big reaction. You snap at someone and realize five minutes later it wasn't about them. You can't concentrate. You're unusually quiet. You keep thinking about work when you're supposed to be somewhere else. Nobody pointed at a sign that said "you're stressed." But something has shifted.

> *"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts."*
>
> — Psalm 139:23

THE INVITATION

Stress doesn't always announce itself clearly. Sometimes you notice it in your patience, your tone, or the size of your reactions.

Emotions aren't instructions. Feeling frustrated doesn't mean you should act frustrated. Feeling afraid doesn't mean the situation is unsafe. But emotions do give us information. Ignoring them doesn't make them disappear. They often come out somewhere else.

A useful first step is simply being able to say: I'm frustrated. I'm disappointed. I'm overwhelmed. Then ask: What's going on underneath that?

Bringing our emotions honestly to God gives us room to notice them without automatically being controlled by them.

EMOTIONS ARE MESSENGERS, NOT MANAGERS.

FIND THE GAP

What emotion has been showing up most often lately?

Where has stress been coming out in your behavior or your leadership?

What's underneath that—pressure, fear, disappointment, tiredness, or something else?

PRACTICE

REPLAY ONE REAL REACTION

Think of a recent moment when your reaction was stronger than you wanted.

What happened?

What did I do?

What was I feeling?

What was underneath that?

What would a better response have looked like?

THIS WEEK

> When you notice yourself reacting strongly, don't immediately fix the feeling. Pause long enough to name it: "I'm feeling ___ because ___." Then decide what you want to do next.

TOGETHER

- What are some early signs that stress is affecting someone's leadership?
- Why can leaders be slow to notice what's happening internally?
- What helps you respond rather than simply react?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you notice what's happening inside you and respond with wisdom rather than letting strong emotions make the decision for you.

GO DEEPER

Psalm 139:23–24, Proverbs 14:29, James 1:19–20, Galatians 5:22–23

PRACTICE 6

Fear and Anxiety

Separate what needs action from what needs trust.

BIG IDEA

Some worry points toward something you need to do. Some worry just keeps you going in circles.

REAL LIFE

You're lying in bed replaying a conversation you need to have. Or you keep checking your phone for a response that hasn't come. Or you've already made the decision but you're still running through what could go wrong. The issue isn't that the concern isn't real. It's that your mind won't stop circling it.

> *"Present your requests to God."*
>
> — Philippians 4:6

THE INVITATION

Worry often starts with something real: a difficult conversation, money, someone you care about, an uncertain decision, or something at work that isn't going well.

Sometimes worry points toward something that actually needs attention. If so, do something. Make the call. Get the information. Have the conversation.

But sometimes your mind keeps returning to the same problem after you've already done what you reasonably can. You replay it. Predict what might happen. Go through the possibilities again.

Paul doesn't tell the Philippians to pretend their concerns aren't real. He tells them to bring those concerns to God. That gives us a practical distinction: Does this need action—or am I going over it again?

DOES THIS NEED ACTION—OR AM I GOING OVER IT AGAIN?

FIND THE GAP

What worry keeps coming back lately?

Is there actually something useful you can do about it right now?

What would change if you could set it down after doing what's yours to do?

PRACTICE

CATCH THE WORRY LOOP

Write down one worry that keeps returning.

What am I worried will happen?

Is there something useful I can do today?

IF YES: What? When will I do it?

IF NO: Write, "There is nothing more I need to do about this right now." Bring the concern specifically to God. Then deliberately return your attention to the next thing in front of you.

THIS WEEK

> When the same worry comes back, ask: "Is there something new to do?" If yes, act. If no, bring it back to God and return to what you're doing.

TOGETHER

- What's the difference between useful planning and repeatedly worrying about the same thing?
- What tends to keep worry going for leaders?
- What helps you return your attention to what's actually in front of you?

PRAY

Tell God plainly what you're worried about. Ask for wisdom where action is needed and help trusting Him when there is nothing more you can do right now.

GO DEEPER

Philippians 4:6–9, Psalm 55:22, Matthew 6:25–34, Isaiah 41:10

PRACTICE 7

Identity and Approval

Lead from who you are, not from who people need you to be.

BIG IDEA

You can listen to people without needing their approval to lead.

REAL LIFE

You made a reasonable decision and someone is unhappy. Now you're second-guessing it. Not because new information changed your mind, but because their disappointment is uncomfortable. You start drafting a longer explanation. You consider reversing the decision. You wonder what they're saying to other people.

> *"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God?"*
>
> — Galatians 1:10

THE INVITATION

Caring what people think isn't automatically a problem. Good leaders listen. They take feedback seriously. They care how decisions affect people.

The problem comes when someone else's approval starts making the decision for us. You say yes because saying no will disappoint someone. Avoid a conversation because they might be upset. Over-explain a reasonable decision.

The opposite isn't "I don't care what anyone thinks." That can produce terrible leadership. The goal is being able to listen carefully without needing everyone to be pleased with you. Sometimes feedback should change your mind. Sometimes someone will simply disagree. Wisdom is learning the difference.

LISTEN CAREFULLY. DON'T NEED EVERYONE TO BE PLEASED.

FIND THE GAP

Whose disappointment is hardest for you to tolerate?

Where might someone's reaction be influencing a decision you're making?

What would you do differently if you didn't need their approval?

PRACTICE

CHECK ONE REAL DECISION

Choose a decision where someone's reaction matters to you.

What do I think is the right thing to do?

Whose reaction am I worried about?

What am I afraid will happen if they're disappointed?

Is their feedback showing me something I need to reconsider—or am I mainly trying to avoid their disappointment?

What would I do if I could listen to them without needing their approval?

THIS WEEK

> Notice one moment when you're tempted to say yes, change direction, over-explain, or avoid something mainly because of someone's reaction. Pause before deciding.

TOGETHER

- Why can approval become particularly powerful in leadership?
- What's the difference between listening to people and needing their agreement?
- What helps leaders remain open to feedback without being driven by it?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit for humility to listen well and freedom from allowing other people's approval to determine your worth or your decisions.

GO DEEPER

Galatians 1:10, Proverbs 29:25, Colossians 3:23–24, 1 Thessalonians 2:4

PRACTICE 8

Failure and Criticism

Learn from it without letting it define you.

BIG IDEA

Failure can teach you without defining you. Criticism can contain something useful without being completely right.

REAL LIFE

Someone told you the project didn't land. Or you made a decision that didn't work out. Or someone gave you feedback that was partly fair and partly unfair—and three days later you're still replaying it. "I handled that badly" has quietly become "I'm terrible at this."

> *"Though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand."*
>
> — Psalm 37:24

THE INVITATION

Criticism can be hard to hear. So can realizing you got something wrong. Sometimes feedback is unfair. Sometimes it's poorly delivered. Sometimes there is enough truth in it that you know you need to pay attention.

Our reactions can go in opposite directions. We defend everything. Or we turn one mistake into a conclusion about ourselves.

Neither helps much. A better response is to separate what happened from everything you're tempted to make it mean. What part is actually yours? Is there something useful to learn? Do you need to apologize, repair something, or change what you do next time?

SEPARATE WHAT HAPPENED FROM WHAT YOU'RE MAKING IT MEAN.

FIND THE GAP

What mistake or criticism have you had difficulty letting go of?

What part of it is actually useful—and what part are you adding?

PRACTICE

SORT WHAT HAPPENED

Use one real mistake, criticism, or disappointment.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED? Stick to the facts.

WHAT'S MINE? What do I need to own?

WHAT CAN I LEARN?

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW? Apologize? Repair? Change something?

WHAT CAN I STOP REPLAYING?

THIS WEEK

> Take one appropriate action. Own it. Repair it. Learn from it. Then resist repeatedly going back over something you've already dealt with.

TOGETHER

- What makes criticism particularly difficult for leaders?
- What helps people receive feedback without immediately becoming defensive?
- How can teams make it normal to acknowledge mistakes and learn from them?

PRAY

Ask God for humility to own what is yours, wisdom to learn from what happened, and help releasing what you no longer need to carry.

GO DEEPER

Psalm 37:23–24, Proverbs 12:1, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 4:8–9

PRACTICE 9

Knowing Your Limits

Plan like a human, not a machine.

BIG IDEA

Recognizing a limit isn't an excuse. It's information for wise leadership.

REAL LIFE

You said yes to something you don't have time for. Again. Not because you didn't know your schedule was full, but because saying no felt like admitting you couldn't handle it. You'll figure it out. Somewhere. You always do. Until the thing that gives is your sleep, your patience, or the people you go home to.

> *"He remembers that we are dust."*
>
> — Psalm 103:14

THE INVITATION

You have limits. There are only so many hours in a day. Your body needs sleep. Your attention gets tired. You cannot be fully available to everyone.

Most leaders know this. We just don't always plan like it's true. We add responsibilities without removing anything. Underestimate how long things take. Expect ourselves to operate normally during unusually difficult periods.

Recognizing a limit isn't an excuse to avoid hard things. There are times to persevere, work hard, and stretch yourself. The question is: Is what I'm expecting of myself actually realistic?

God knows we're human. Part of wise leadership is remembering it too.

CAPACITY IS NOT CHARACTER.

FIND THE GAP

Where are you expecting more from yourself than you realistically have available?

Which limits are hardest for you to accept?

What would change if you planned as though limits were real instead of optional?

PRACTICE

PART 03

LEAD WITH CAPACITY

Your body, energy, attention, and schedule are part of how you lead.

PRACTICE 10

Sleep and Energy

You can't lead well on what's left over.

BIG IDEA

Tiredness is not a badge of commitment. It's a signal worth noticing.

REAL LIFE

It's 11:30 p.m. and you're still going. Not because something urgent happened but because the house is finally quiet and you're catching up on the things the day didn't have room for. Tomorrow you'll be tired again. You already know that. But stopping feels like falling behind.

> *"In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety."*
>
> — Psalm 4:8

THE INVITATION

Sometimes tiredness is unavoidable. A child is awake. You're travelling. Someone needs you.

But sometimes being tired has simply become normal. You stay up finishing one more thing. Keep scrolling when you meant to go to bed. Work late because the house is finally quiet.

Sleep affects attention, patience, emotions, and decision-making. That makes it a leadership issue, not just a health issue.

You don't need a perfect sleep routine. Start with a simpler question: Is there anything I'm doing that is making my sleep harder than it already needs to be?

TIRED IS NOT THE SAME AS FAITHFUL.

FIND THE GAP

How has your sleep actually been lately?

What most often gets in the way?

Is tiredness affecting how you lead, relate, or make decisions?

PRACTICE

LOOK AT THE LAST SEVEN NIGHTS

Don't rate your sleep from memory. Look back over the last week.

What was outside my control?

What was within my control?

Is there a pattern?

Is there one thing I could realistically change? If there isn't, don't invent one.

THIS WEEK

> If you identified something within your control, change one thing. At the end of the week, ask: Did it help?

TOGETHER

- Why is sleep often one of the first things people give up when life gets busy?
- How does tiredness tend to affect the way we respond to people?
- What helps protect sleep during demanding periods?

PRAY

Ask God for wisdom about what you can change, grace for circumstances you cannot control, and willingness to respect the limits of the body He has given you.

GO DEEPER

Psalm 4:8, Psalm 127:2, Mark 6:31, Genesis 2:2–3

PRACTICE 11

Taking Care of Your Body

Ordinary care, not another project.

BIG IDEA

Your body is part of how you lead. It needs ordinary care, not a self-improvement plan.

REAL LIFE

You skipped lunch again. Or the appointment you've been meaning to book has been on your mental list for three months. Or the last time you did something physical was so long ago you can't remember. Not because you don't care, but because something else always felt more urgent.

> *"For in him we live and move and have our being."*
>
> — Acts 17:28

THE INVITATION

This isn't a fitness plan. There isn't one exercise routine, diet, body type, or health practice that every leader needs.

The point is simpler: You have a body, and it needs ordinary care. When life gets busy, basic things can quietly get pushed aside.

Taking care of your body doesn't need to become another self-improvement project. Sometimes the next step is very ordinary: eat lunch, go for a walk, book the appointment, get outside, follow through on something you already know helps.

TAKE CARE OF THE BODY YOU'RE LEADING FROM.

FIND THE GAP

What part of your physical health gets pushed aside most easily?

Is there something you've been meaning to take care of but keep delaying?

PRACTICE

CHECK THE BASICS

Think about your actual last seven days.

MOVEMENT — Did I regularly move in ways that were good for me?

MEALS — Did my schedule regularly interfere with eating reasonably?

HEALTH — Is there an appointment, concern, or health need I've been putting off?

What actually needs my attention? Choose one thing.

THIS WEEK

> Do one ordinary thing that supports your physical health. Not five. One.

TOGETHER

- Why can basic physical care become difficult when life gets busy?
- What helps health practices remain realistic rather than becoming another project?
- What simple things actually help you feel and function better?

PRAY

Thank God for the body He has given you. Ask for wisdom to care for it without making health either an obsession or something you continually ignore.

GO DEEPER

Acts 17:28, 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, Genesis 2:7, Romans 12:1

PRACTICE 12

Rest and Sabbath

Stop before everything is finished. It never will be.

BIG IDEA

Rest doesn't have to be earned by finishing everything first. Everything is rarely finished.

REAL LIFE

You're home, but your mind is still at work. You check email during dinner. You think about tomorrow's meeting while you're supposed to be present with your family. You took the day off, but you're mentally tracking everything happening without you. Your body stopped. Your mind didn't.

> *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*
>
> — Mark 2:27

THE INVITATION

You can be away from work without actually stopping. You're home but checking email. At dinner but thinking about tomorrow.

Sometimes work really does require attention outside normal hours. The more useful question is whether you still have regular times when you actually stop.

Sabbath reminds us that we aren't designed for constant work. It also confronts something leadership can make difficult to believe: Things can continue without our constant involvement.

Jesus described Sabbath as something given for people, not another burden to perform correctly.

THINGS CAN CONTINUE WITHOUT YOUR CONSTANT INVOLVEMENT.

FIND THE GAP

When are you genuinely off work right now?

What most often pulls work back into that time?

What would change if you believed things could continue without you for a day?

PRACTICE

FIND YOUR ACTUAL OFF TIME

Open your calendar. Look at the next seven days.

Where am I supposed to be off?

What normally pulls work into that time?

What could I change? Maybe turn off work notifications, set a stopping time, leave your laptop somewhere else, tell people when you'll be unavailable, or write tomorrow's tasks down before stopping. Choose one.

THIS WEEK

> Protect one real period of rest. When something about work comes to mind, decide: Does this actually need attention now? If not, write it down if necessary and return to it later.

TOGETHER

- Why can stopping be difficult for leaders?
- What's the difference between being away from work and actually resting?
- What helps protect time off from work that can wait?

PRAY

Thank God that everything does not depend on your constant activity. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize when work is needed and when it is time to stop.

GO DEEPER

Mark 2:27, Genesis 2:2–3, Exodus 20:8–11, Hebrews 4:9–11

PRACTICE 13

Schedule and Capacity

Full is not the same as faithful.

BIG IDEA

When everything is urgent, nothing gets your best. An honest schedule creates room for what matters.

REAL LIFE

Your week is full before it starts. Meetings fill every gap. You've already committed to more than the hours allow. Then something unexpected arrives—and there's no room. Something gets squeezed: sleep, a relationship, time with God, your health, or simply the ability to think clearly about the next decision.

> *"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."*
>
> — Mark 6:31

THE INVITATION

Jesus and His disciples knew what it was like to have more needs around them than they could respond to. In Mark 6, they were so busy they didn't even have time to eat. Jesus doesn't treat every unmet need as proof that they should keep going.

Busy weeks are part of leadership. The problem comes when full capacity becomes normal capacity.

Sometimes faithfulness means working hard. Sometimes it means recognizing that something can wait, someone else can help, or something doesn't need to happen at all.

YOU DON'T NEED A PERFECT SCHEDULE. YOU NEED AN HONEST ONE.

FIND THE GAP

What usually gets pushed aside first when your schedule gets too full?

What makes it difficult for you to change or remove commitments?

What would your week look like if you planned for the unexpected?

PRACTICE

LOOK AT YOUR ACTUAL WEEK

Open your calendar. Look at the last two weeks.

What keeps getting squeezed out?

What consistently takes longer than I expect?

Where do I have almost no room when something unexpected happens?

What am I doing because I need to—and what am I doing because I've never reconsidered it?

CHANGE ONE THING:

- [ ] Move it
- [ ] Shorten it
- [ ] Delegate it
- [ ] Say no
- [ ] Protect time for something else
- [ ] Leave some space open

What am I changing?

THIS WEEK

> Make one real change to your calendar this week. At the end of the week, ask: Did it help?

TOGETHER

- What turns a busy week into an unsustainable one?
- What helps people recognize they're getting too full before they're already overwhelmed?
- How can a team help without expecting everyone to have unlimited capacity?

PRAY

Ask God for wisdom to know what needs your attention, what can wait, where you need help, and what you don't need to carry right now.

GO DEEPER

Mark 6:30–32, Luke 10:38–42, Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, Psalm 90:12

PRACTICE 14

Technology and Attention

Choose where your attention goes.

BIG IDEA

Attention is limited. Where you give it is a leadership decision.

REAL LIFE

Your phone buzzes during a conversation. You glance down. It wasn't important, but now you've lost the thread. Or you sit down to pray and within ninety seconds you're checking something. Or your child is talking and you're reading a message. You didn't decide to be somewhere else. Your phone decided for you.

> *"Be very careful, then, how you live... making the most of every opportunity."*
>
> — Ephesians 5:15–16

THE INVITATION

Your phone is useful. That's part of why it so easily ends up everywhere. During meals. Beside the bed. In meetings. During prayer.

The issue isn't whether technology is good or bad. It's whether you're choosing where your attention goes. A notification feels urgent because it arrived. That doesn't necessarily mean it deserves your attention right now.

Attention is limited. When you give it to one thing, you're temporarily taking it away from something else. That makes technology more than a productivity issue. It affects prayer, rest, relationships, work, and your ability to be fully engaged with what is in front of you.

A NOTIFICATION IS NOT THE SAME AS A PRIORITY.

FIND THE GAP

When do you check your phone most automatically?

Where is technology interrupting something that matters more to you?

What would change if you chose where your attention went instead of letting your phone decide?

PRACTICE

PART 04

LEAD WITH PEOPLE

Leadership is always happening in relationship.

PRACTICE 15

Friendship and Support

Who would you actually call?

BIG IDEA

Being around people is not the same as being known by people.

REAL LIFE

You spend most of your day talking with people. Staff. Volunteers. Members. Clients. People who need you. But when someone asks how you're really doing, you give the short version. When something is genuinely hard, you handle it. You have people around you. But you're not sure you have people who know you.

> *"Two are better than one... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."*
>
> — Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

THE INVITATION

Being around people isn't the same as being known by people. Leadership can actually make that distinction harder. You may spend most of your day helping others. But who do you call when you're having a hard week?

Sometimes friendships gradually become mostly about work. Sometimes busy schedules squeeze them out. Sometimes leaders become so accustomed to helping other people that asking for support themselves feels unusual.

You don't need a huge circle of close friends. But it matters to have people around whom you don't always have to be the leader.

WHO WOULD YOU ACTUALLY CALL?

FIND THE GAP

Who knows what's actually going on in your life right now?

If you had a really difficult week, who would you call?

When did you last talk honestly with someone who wasn't asking you for something?

PRACTICE

WHO'S ACTUALLY AROUND ME?

Don't write who you could theoretically call. Write who you probably would.

Who can I talk honestly with when things are difficult?

Who gives me wise perspective and can disagree with me?

Who could I ask for practical help?

Who do I enjoy being with when work or ministry isn't the point?

Is there someone I want to be more intentional about staying connected with?

Is one of these spaces blank? Just notice it.

THIS WEEK

> Choose one person. Do something with that answer this week: text, call, meet, reconnect, ask, or schedule time. Don't wait until you desperately need support.

TOGETHER

- Why can friendship become harder as leadership responsibilities increase?
- What's the difference between being surrounded by people and actually being supported?
- What helps friendships survive busy periods?

PRAY

Thank God for the people who know and support you. Ask Him to help you make room for relationships where you can both give and receive.

GO DEEPER

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, Proverbs 27:17, Galatians 6:2, 1 Samuel 23:16

PRACTICE 16

People Closest to You

They shouldn't only get what's left over.

BIG IDEA

Work announces what it needs. The people closest to you often don't.

REAL LIFE

You promised you'd be home for dinner. Then something came up. Not a crisis—just something that felt like it couldn't wait. You walk in the door, and the people who were waiting for you get the version of you that's already spent. Again.

> *"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."*
>
> — Romans 12:10

THE INVITATION

Work is good at announcing what it needs. An email arrives. Someone needs a decision. A deadline appears. The people closest to you may not announce their needs nearly as clearly.

So people we deeply care about can gradually receive whatever time and attention remain after everything urgent has been handled.

There will be demanding periods when work genuinely requires more. The question is what becomes normal. Do the people closest to you regularly get your attention? Do you know what's happening in their lives?

Relationships need more than good intentions. They need some of your actual time.

DON'T LET THE LOUDEST DEMANDS GET YOUR BEST.

FIND THE GAP

Who are the people you most want to protect time with?

Has anyone close to you mostly been getting what's left over lately?

What would they say if you asked?

PRACTICE

LOOK AT YOUR ACTUAL WEEK

Write the names of the people closest to you. Open your calendar for the next seven days.

Where will these people actually get my attention?

What is most likely to interrupt that?

Is there anything I need to protect, schedule, move, or change?

You don't necessarily need another calendar event. Maybe the change is: My laptop stays closed tonight.

THIS WEEK

> Choose one concrete way to give someone close to you your attention. Protect that time from work that can reasonably wait.

TOGETHER

- Why can close relationships get squeezed even when they matter deeply to us?
- What helps protect important relationships during demanding periods?
- What are some early signs that work is taking more space than you want it to?

PRAY

Thank God for the people closest to you. Ask for wisdom to handle your responsibilities without continually giving important relationships whatever is left.

GO DEEPER

Romans 12:10, Ephesians 5:25–33, Deuteronomy 6:6–9, Proverbs 17:1

PRACTICE 17

Being Present with People

Understand before you solve.

BIG IDEA

People know when you're listening and when you're waiting to talk.

REAL LIFE

Someone is telling you something important. You're nodding. But in your head, you're already preparing your response. Or thinking about the meeting in twenty minutes. Or glancing at your phone. They finish talking and you offer a solution—but they didn't ask for one. They wanted to be heard.

> *"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak..."*
>
> — James 1:19

THE INVITATION

You can be in a conversation without giving it much attention. You're thinking about the next meeting. Your phone lights up. You're preparing your response while the other person is still talking.

Leaders are particularly vulnerable to this because there is almost always something else waiting.

Being present doesn't mean everyone gets unlimited access to your time. Sometimes the respectful thing is: "I have ten minutes right now. Is that enough, or should we find another time?" That's better than pretending to listen while your attention is somewhere else.

James gives us a simple practice: Listen before speaking. And for leaders: Understand before solving.

UNDERSTAND BEFORE YOU SOLVE.

FIND THE GAP

What most often pulls your attention away from people?

When do you tend to start solving before you've finished listening?

What would the people around you say about how present you are?

PRACTICE

LISTEN WITHOUT FIXING

Use a real conversation. For the first few minutes: Don't check your phone. Don't give advice. Don't tell your similar story. Don't start solving.

Then notice: How difficult was it to simply listen?

Instead, ask at least two questions before offering your opinion.

Try: "What happened?" "What do you think?" "What would be helpful from me?"

THIS WEEK

> Choose one conversation each day where you intentionally put distractions away and listen before trying to fix anything. Ordinary conversations count.

TOGETHER

- How can you tell when someone is really listening?
- What makes it difficult to stay present in conversations?
- What can you do when you genuinely don't have enough time to give someone your attention?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you notice the people in front of you and listen with patience rather than always rushing toward what comes next.

GO DEEPER

James 1:19–20, Proverbs 18:13, Philippians 2:3–4, Colossians 3:12–14

PRACTICE 18

Conflict and Repair

Address it before it grows.

BIG IDEA

Healthy relationships still have conflict. What matters is what happens next.

REAL LIFE

Something happened. You know it needs to be addressed, but the conversation would be uncomfortable. So you wait. Maybe it will resolve itself. Maybe they'll bring it up first. A week goes by. The tension is still there. Now it's harder to raise because so much time has passed.

> *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*
>
> — Romans 12:18

THE INVITATION

Some people avoid tension and hope it disappears. Others address it so quickly that the conversation becomes harsher than it needed to be. Sometimes we talk to several other people about the problem before talking to the person involved.

Repair usually requires something more direct: Talk to the person. Listen. Be honest about what happened. Take responsibility for your part. Clarify what needs to happen next.

Romans also gives us an important limit: "As far as it depends on you." You can take responsibility for your part. You cannot control the other person's response.

OWN YOUR PART. SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID. LISTEN.

FIND THE GAP

Is there tension in an important relationship that needs attention?

Is there anything you already know you need to own?

What would it cost to leave this unaddressed?

PRACTICE

PREPARE ONE REAL CONVERSATION

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED? Stick to what you know.

WHAT'S MY PART?

WHAT DO I NEED TO UNDERSTAND FROM THEM?

WHAT DO I NEED TO SAY?

WHAT WOULD REPAIR LOOK LIKE FROM MY SIDE?

Now decide whether a conversation is needed.

THIS WEEK

> If it is appropriate and safe, have the conversation. If the situation involves something more serious than ordinary relational conflict, get appropriate support rather than forcing a conversation because this guide told you to have one.

TOGETHER

- What makes relational tension easy to avoid?
- What tends to make conflict worse?
- What helps people address small problems before they become larger ones?

PRAY

Ask God for humility about your part, courage to address what needs attention, and patience to listen well.

GO DEEPER

Romans 12:17–18, Matthew 18:15–17, Ephesians 4:25–32, Proverbs 15:1

PRACTICE 19

Asking for Help

Ask before it becomes urgent.

BIG IDEA

The question isn't whether you need help. It's whether you ask early enough for help to actually be helpful.

REAL LIFE

You've been handling something for weeks that another person could have helped with. You didn't ask because it felt faster to do it yourself. Or you didn't want to bother anyone. Or you thought you should be able to handle it. Now it's bigger than it needed to be, and asking feels harder than it would have at the start.

> *"Carry each other's burdens..."*
>
> — Galatians 6:2

THE INVITATION

Leaders get used to being asked for help. Asking for it can be harder. Sometimes it's faster to do something yourself. Sometimes you don't want to inconvenience anyone. Sometimes you think you should be able to handle it.

A more useful question is: Do I ask early enough for help to actually be helpful?

Help can mean different things. Maybe you need someone to listen, give advice, do something, share a responsibility, teach you, or pray with you. People don't always know what you need. Being specific makes it much easier for someone to respond.

ASK BEFORE IT BECOMES URGENT.

FIND THE GAP

What do you find hardest to ask other people for help with?

Is there something you're currently doing alone that doesn't need to be done alone?

PRACTICE

MAKE THE ASK SPECIFIC

Choose something where help would genuinely be useful.

WHAT DO I NEED HELP WITH?

PART 05

LEAD OTHERS WELL

Carry responsibility—and build people who can carry it with you.

PRACTICE 20

Leading Under Pressure

Notice what pressure does to you before it drives your next decision.

BIG IDEA

Pressure doesn't create your patterns. It reveals them.

REAL LIFE

Three things need your attention at once. A deadline moved. Someone is upset. You don't have enough information but people need direction. You start making decisions faster—but they're not better decisions. They're just faster ones. You're not leading from wisdom right now. You're leading from urgency.

> *"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."*
>
> — Luke 5:16

THE INVITATION

Pressure comes with leadership. Deadlines collide. Someone needs an answer. A problem appears unexpectedly. People disagree.

The important thing to notice is what pressure does to you. Maybe you speed up. Become impatient. Take more control. Avoid things. Work longer. Say yes too quickly. Withdraw.

Jesus faced constant demands, yet Luke repeatedly describes Him stepping away to pray. He didn't allow every demand around Him to determine what He did next.

We won't eliminate pressure from leadership. But we can learn to recognize our patterns early enough that pressure doesn't automatically make the next decision for us.

PRESSURE REVEALS. NOTICE BEFORE IT DRIVES.

FIND THE GAP

What's creating the most pressure for you right now?

What's usually your first sign that pressure is affecting you?

What decision are you making from urgency that might need a pause?

PRACTICE

REPLAY ONE PRESSURE MOMENT

Think of a recent situation where you felt significant pressure.

What was happening?

What did I notice in myself?

What did I do next?

Did that help?

What would have helped me respond better?

Complete: When I start ___, pressure is probably affecting me.

THIS WEEK

> Watch for that warning sign. When you notice it, pause and ask: "What actually needs my attention right now?" Then decide what to do.

TOGETHER

- What does pressure tend to do to leaders?
- What are some early signs that someone is becoming overloaded?
- What helps people respond well when several things need attention at once?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize pressure early and respond with wisdom rather than simply reacting.

GO DEEPER

Luke 5:16, Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 30:15, 2 Chronicles 20:12

PRACTICE 21

Decision-Making

Decide when it's time to decide.

BIG IDEA

Continuing to think about a decision doesn't always improve it.

REAL LIFE

A decision has been sitting on your desk for two weeks. You have the information. You've talked to the right people. You've prayed. But you keep going over the options because none of them feels certain enough. Meanwhile, the team is waiting. The opportunity is narrowing. Delay has become its own decision.

> *"The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty."*
>
> — Proverbs 21:5

THE INVITATION

Leadership decisions rarely come with perfect information. You may have several reasonable options. People may disagree. There may be real trade-offs. And waiting doesn't always make things clearer.

One useful distinction is: Do I actually need more information—or am I uncomfortable making the decision?

Sometimes you need more information. Get it. Sometimes someone else needs to be consulted. Talk to them. Sometimes the decision genuinely isn't ready. Wait.

But eventually, continuing to think about a decision doesn't necessarily improve it. You have enough information. You understand the main trade-offs. You've prayed. Now leadership requires choosing.

DO I NEED MORE INFORMATION—OR DO I NEED TO DECIDE?

FIND THE GAP

What decision is taking up the most mental space right now?

What are you actually waiting for?

Is this delay making the decision better—or just postponing it?

PRACTICE

MOVE ONE REAL DECISION FORWARD

WHAT AM I ACTUALLY DECIDING? One sentence.

WHAT DO I ALREADY KNOW?

WHAT DO I STILL NEED TO KNOW?

WHO ACTUALLY NEEDS INPUT?

WHAT ARE MY REALISTIC OPTIONS? 1.___ 2.___ 3.___

WHEN DOES THIS ACTUALLY NEED TO BE DECIDED?

DO I NEED MORE INFORMATION OR DO I NEED TO DECIDE?

THIS WEEK

> Move the decision forward. Get the missing information. Ask for the needed input. Make the decision. Or intentionally set the date when you'll decide.

TOGETHER

- What causes leaders to decide too quickly?
- What causes them to wait too long?
- How do you know when you have enough information to decide?

PRAY

Ask God for wisdom, humility to listen, courage to decide when needed, and willingness to change direction if you learn something important.

GO DEEPER

Proverbs 21:5, Proverbs 15:22, James 1:5–6, Joshua 1:9

PRACTICE 22

Control and Delegation

Transfer ownership, not just tasks.

BIG IDEA

Delegation isn't just giving someone work. It's giving someone appropriate ownership.

REAL LIFE

You gave someone the project. Then you checked their draft. Rewrote part of it. Asked how the meeting went. Suggested how to handle the conversation. Reviewed the final version again. The task was delegated. The ownership wasn't.

> *"Select capable men from all the people... Have them serve as judges for the people at all times."*
>
> — Exodus 18:21–22

THE INVITATION

You can assign a task and still check everything, make every decision, rewrite their work, step back in when they do it differently, or require approval for things they could reasonably decide themselves.

Jethro's advice to Moses was practical: other capable people needed to carry real responsibility.

Good delegation doesn't mean disappearing. People may need direction, resources, authority, feedback, and clear expectations. But eventually they also need room to do the work.

A useful question is: Have I transferred ownership—or just assigned a task?

DON'T JUST TRANSFER THE TASK. TRANSFER OWNERSHIP.

FIND THE GAP

Where are you still involved in something another person could reasonably own?

What makes it difficult to step back?

What would you need to see in order to let go?

PRACTICE

TRANSFER ONE REAL RESPONSIBILITY

Choose something another person could own more fully.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY?

WHO COULD OWN IT?

WHAT RESULT OR EXPECTATION NEEDS TO BE CLEAR?

WHAT DECISIONS CAN THEY MAKE WITHOUT ME?

WHAT STILL NEEDS MY INVOLVEMENT?

WHEN WILL WE CHECK IN?

What am I still holding that I could reasonably release?

THIS WEEK

> Have the conversation. Clarify the responsibility, authority, expectations, and follow-up. Then let the person own what you've agreed they own.

TOGETHER

- What's the difference between delegation and simply assigning work?
- What does someone need before they can genuinely own something?
- When should a leader step back in—and when should they let someone learn?

PRAY

Ask God for wisdom to know what you need to carry and what you can entrust to other capable people.

GO DEEPER

Exodus 18:13–26, 2 Timothy 2:2, Ephesians 4:11–13, Numbers 11:16–17

PRACTICE 23

Difficult Conversations

Clear and kind. Not one or the other.

BIG IDEA

Avoiding the conversation rarely makes it easier. Having it badly makes it worse.

REAL LIFE

You know the conversation needs to happen. Expectations aren't being met. A behavior is affecting the team. A boundary needs to be clearer. But every time you think about raising it, you find a reason to wait. Maybe it will improve on its own. Maybe next week will be better. The problem doesn't improve. The conversation gets harder.

> *"Speaking the truth in love..."*
>
> — Ephesians 4:15

THE INVITATION

Not every difficult conversation starts with conflict. Sometimes expectations aren't being met. Someone needs feedback. A boundary needs to be clearer. You need to say no. A behavior is affecting the team.

Avoiding the conversation can feel easier in the short term. Usually the problem remains.

But being direct doesn't mean saying everything you're thinking as bluntly as possible. Useful conversations are usually clear, specific, and respectful.

Compare: "You're unreliable." vs. "The report was due Monday and I received it Thursday. Can we talk about what happened and what we need to do differently next time?" The second may still be uncomfortable. But the person knows what you're talking about.

SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID. SAY IT WITH RESPECT.

FIND THE GAP

What conversation have you been putting off?

What actually needs to be clear by the end of it?

What's the cost of continuing to wait?

PRACTICE

PREPARE THE FIRST TWO MINUTES

Choose a real conversation.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED? Use facts, not labels.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

WHAT DO I NEED TO UNDERSTAND FROM THEM?

WHAT NEEDS TO BE CLEAR?

Now write the first sentence or two you could actually say.

Read it aloud. Does it sound like you? Is it clear? Is it respectful? If it sounds like HR wrote it, rewrite it.

THIS WEEK

> If appropriate, put the conversation on the calendar. If the issue involves safety, abuse, serious misconduct, employment law, or formal discipline, use the appropriate policies and professional support.

TOGETHER

- Why do leaders avoid conversations that need to happen?
- What makes feedback useful rather than simply critical?
- How can someone be clear without becoming unnecessarily harsh?

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit for courage to say what needs to be said, humility to listen, and wisdom to treat the other person with respect.

GO DEEPER

Ephesians 4:15–16, Proverbs 27:5–6, Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1

PRACTICE 24

Developing Other Leaders

Don't just finish today's task. Build tomorrow's leader.

BIG IDEA

You can lead a productive team without developing many leaders. But eventually everyone still needs you.

REAL LIFE

Things get done because you do them. You make the decisions. Handle the difficult problems. Answer the questions. The team is productive—but nobody is growing. If you left tomorrow, most of what you carry would stop.

> *"Entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."*
>
> — 2 Timothy 2:2

THE INVITATION

It's possible to lead a productive team without developing many leaders. You make the decisions. Solve the difficult problems. Things get done. But everyone continues needing you.

Developing people requires something different. Let them do things they aren't already great at. Explain how you think. Give them meaningful responsibility. Let them make some decisions. Give feedback.

At first, that can take longer than doing something yourself. But you're not only trying to finish today's task. You're helping another person become more capable tomorrow.

A useful leadership question is: Who is becoming more capable because I'm investing in them?

DON'T JUST FINISH TODAY'S TASK. BUILD TOMORROW'S LEADER.

FIND THE GAP

Who are you intentionally helping grow right now?

What do you know how to do that someone else needs an opportunity to learn?

What would happen if you were unavailable for a month?

PRACTICE

CHOOSE ONE PERSON

Write the name of someone you could intentionally help develop.

WHAT COULD THEY BECOME BETTER AT? Be specific.

WHAT COULD I LET THEM ACTUALLY DO?

WHAT DO THEY NEED FROM ME FIRST?

- [ ] Explanation
- [ ] Example
- [ ] Practice
- [ ] Resources
- [ ] Feedback
- [ ] Encouragement
- [ ] Authority

WHAT DECISION COULD THEY START MAKING?

WHEN WILL I FOLLOW UP?

THIS WEEK

> Give this person one real opportunity to learn, practice, decide, or take greater ownership. Then give useful feedback. Don't automatically take the responsibility back because their first attempt looks different from yours.

TOGETHER

- What's the difference between giving someone work and developing them?
- Why can development feel slower at first?
- What kinds of responsibility actually help people grow?

PRAY

Ask God to help you see potential in other people, invest patiently in their growth, and give meaningful responsibility away.

GO DEEPER

PRACTICE 25

How You Measure Success

Results matter. They're not the whole story.

BIG IDEA

Results help you learn. Faithfulness reminds you what ultimately belongs to you.

REAL LIFE

The event didn't draw the numbers you hoped. The project didn't produce the result the board wanted. Someone else's ministry seems to be growing faster. You led well—but the scoreboard doesn't reflect that. And the scoreboard is the thing people see.

> *"It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."*
>
> — 1 Corinthians 4:2

THE INVITATION

Every leader has some kind of scoreboard: attendance, growth, revenue, feedback, projects completed, people helped, goals reached, or what another leader is doing.

Results matter. Good leaders should care whether what they're doing is actually working. But results aren't completely within our control. You can lead well and still experience disappointing results.

Christian leadership adds another measure: faithfulness. Faithfulness doesn't mean ignoring outcomes or lowering standards. It means asking more than "Did it work?" We also ask: "Was I faithful with what God gave me to do?"

We need both questions. Results help us learn. Faithfulness reminds us what ultimately belongs to us.

FAITHFUL WITH WHAT'S MINE. TRUSTING GOD WITH WHAT ISN'T.

FIND THE GAP

What result most affects whether you feel like you're doing well?

Who or what are you most tempted to compare yourself with?

What would change if faithfulness mattered as much as the scoreboard?

THE

LEAD EMPOWERED LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Keep leading after the curriculum ends.

Lead Empowered Quick Tools

These tools distill the strongest frameworks from the 25 Practices into quick-reference guides you can return to when real leadership situations arise.

WHERE AM I LEADING FROM?

PAUSE — What's happening right now?

NOTICE — What am I feeling? What am I relying on?

ASK — Am I leading from connection with God—or from pressure, fear, control, approval, or exhaustion?

RETURN — God, what do You want me to notice? What is my next faithful thing?

WHEN I AM UNDER PRESSURE

STOP — What is pressure doing to me right now?

NAME — Am I speeding up, controlling, avoiding, or people-pleasing?

SEPARATE — What actually needs my attention right now?

DECIDE — What is my next wise response—not my fastest reaction?

WHEN I NEED TO MAKE A DECISION

CLARIFY — What am I actually deciding? One sentence.

GATHER — What do I know? What do I still need?

DISCERN — What does Scripture, wisdom, counsel, and prayer suggest?

CHECK — What fear, ego, urgency, or approval is influencing me?

DECIDE — Do I need more information—or do I need to decide?

WHEN I AM CARRYING TOO MUCH

MINE — What is actually mine to do?

NOT MINE — What belongs to someone else, circumstances, or God?

CAPACITY — Given what I actually have, what is realistic?

CHANGE — What needs to move, shrink, stop, or shift to someone else?

WHEN I NEED A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

FACTS — What actually happened? No labels.

MATTER — Why does this matter?

LISTEN — What do I need to understand from them?

CLEAR — What needs to be clear by the end?

FIRST WORDS — Write the first sentence. Read it aloud. Say it with respect.

WHEN I NEED TO DELEGATE

WHAT — What is the responsibility?

WHO — Who could own it?

EXPECT — What result or standard needs to be clear?

AUTHORITY — What can they decide without me?

CHECK IN — When will we follow up?

RELEASE — Let them own it.

WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS

OWN — What is my part?

LISTEN — What do I need to understand?

SAY — What needs to be said—clearly and with respect?

REPAIR — What does repair look like from my side?

LIMIT — As far as it depends on me.

WHEN I AM EVALUATING SUCCESS

RESULTS — What happened?

LEARN — What can I learn?

FAITHFUL — Was I faithful with what was mine to do?

PEOPLE — How did I treat people along the way?

BOTH — Keep the results. Don’t let them be the whole scoreboard.

Lead Empowered Reflection Rhythm

Leadership formation doesn't happen once. It happens through repeated, honest reflection over time. Use these rhythms to stay connected to what matters.

Weekly — Five Minutes

At the end of each week, answer three questions:

Where was I leading from this week? (Connection? Pressure? Fear? Exhaustion? Faithfulness?)

What is one thing I want to pay attention to next week?

What do I need from God before next week begins?

Monthly — Twenty Minutes

Once a month, review your Check-In categories. Ask:

Which area of my life or leadership has had the most attention this month?

Which area has had the least?

Is there a Practice I need to revisit?

What one pattern do I want to address next month?

Quarterly — One Hour

Every three months, take an hour for a deeper review:

Retake the Lead Empowered Check-In. What has shifted?

Where have I grown? What's different from three months ago?

What pattern keeps returning? What would help me address it?

Who am I investing in? Who is investing in me?

Where am I leading from—honestly?

Yearly — Half a Day

Once a year, take a longer block of time—a morning, an afternoon, or a retreat—to reflect on the full picture:

What has God been doing in me and through me this year?

What has been the most important lesson in my leadership?

What do I want to carry forward? What do I want to leave behind?

Where is God inviting me to grow next?

What would faithfulness look like in the season ahead?

What I’m Working On

If something matters enough that you want to keep working on it beyond one Practice, capture it here.

What would be useful to work on right now?

What have I noticed? What’s actually happening?

What do I want to be different? Keep this concrete.

What am I going to try? Choose something I can actually do.

When will I do it? Put it somewhere in real life.

What could get in the way?

If that happens, what will I do?

Who could help?

With God — What do I want to bring to God, ask Him about, or pay attention to as I work on this?

I’ll check back on:

How Did It Go?

You don't need to finish a topic and immediately move to another one. Try what you chose. Give it some time. Then come back and see what actually happened.

What did I try?

What actually happened?

What helped?

What got in the way?

What did I notice? About myself, another person, the situation, or what was happening around me.

Did I notice anything in my relationship with God?

What do I want to keep doing?

What do I want to change?

What now?

- [ ] Keep working on this
- [ ] Change what I'm trying
- [ ] Talk it through with someone
- [ ] Choose another topic
- [ ] Nothing else right now

Facilitator Quick Guide

YOU DON'T NEED TO TEACH THIS.

Lead Empowered is designed to create useful conversations and practices, not give you another lesson to prepare. Choose a topic that fits your team and work through it together.

Before

Choose one topic. Pick something genuinely useful for your team. Read it once so you know where the conversation is going. Decide what fits—you don't have to use every question. If you have less time, keep: Scripture → a little discussion → Practice → next step → prayer. The Practice is usually the part worth protecting.

During

Start with a quick check-in: What has been good lately? What's been difficult? Anything from last time worth talking about? Then let the guide do the work. Read the Scripture. Read or summarize the short section. Ask a question. Let people talk. You don't need to have the best answer after every response.

Ask more than you explain. Try: What makes you say that? What does that look like for you? What have you found helpful? Does anyone see that differently?

Don't force personal sharing. People can pass on any question. Don't spend the whole time discussing the idea and then skip the practical part. Do the Practice.

Finish

Ask: What would be useful to try? Each person can choose their own next step. Pray together. That's enough.

Important Boundaries

- Don't diagnose people. This guide helps people reflect. It isn't a clinical assessment.
- Don't use Check-In answers to evaluate staff. The Check-In is for personal reflection, not performance management.
- Don't force vulnerability. People decide what they want to share.
- Some things are better discussed privately with a trusted person, pastor, counselor, psychologist, physician, or other appropriate support.
- Follow your organization's policies for safety concerns, abuse, harassment, serious misconduct, or employment matters.

If You Only Remember Six Things:

1. Choose something useful.

2. Keep the teaching short.

3. Ask good questions.

4. Let people pass.

5. Do the Practice.

6. Choose one next step and pray.

Keep Leading

The goal was never to become so capable that you no longer need the Source. It is the opposite. You increasingly recognize your dependence, return more quickly, receive more freely, notice more honestly, lead more wisely, and bring more of your ordinary life into relationship with God.

WHERE AM I LEADING FROM?

RESPONSIBILITY IS YOURS. OUTCOMES AREN'T.

EMOTIONS ARE MESSENGERS, NOT MANAGERS.

CAPACITY IS NOT CHARACTER.

UNDERSTAND BEFORE YOU SOLVE.

DON'T JUST FINISH TODAY'S TASK. BUILD TOMORROW'S LEADER.

FAITHFUL WITH WHAT'S MINE. TRUSTING GOD WITH WHAT ISN'T.

One Practice I want to carry forward:

One area of my leadership where I want greater integration:

One person or room where I want to lead differently:

COMMISSIONING PRAYER

Father, thank You that I do not have to earn Your love or generate life from my own reserves.

Jesus, teach me Your way of leading—with truth, grace, courage, compassion, wisdom, and faithful presence.

Holy Spirit, fill and lead me in ordinary moments. Help me notice when I drift onto autopilot, return without hiding, receive what I need, and respond faithfully.

Bring more of my real life and leadership into relationship with You. Teach me to lead from connection, not from pressure. Help me carry what is mine and trust You with what isn't.