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Thriving in ministry



*Lessons from
J.C.*

THE MAKING OF A LEADER

BY BRIAN HOUSMAN, EXECUTIVE PASTOR, BOSTON VINEYARD

BRIAN WAS BORN AND RAISED IN CHICAGO AND MOVED TO BOSTON FOR COLLEGE WHERE HE ENDED UP STAYING. HE SPENT TEN YEARS WITH INTERVARSITY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, FIRST AS A STAFF MEMBER AT HARVARD AND YALE AND THEN AS THE BOSTON AREA DIRECTOR. SIX YEARS AGO, HE LEFT IV TO BECOME THE EXECUTIVE PASTOR FOR THE GREATER BOSTON VINEYARD AND CURRENTLY ALSO SERVES AS THE SITE PASTOR FOR THEIR CAMBRIDGE LOCATION. HE ENJOYS ROAD BICYCLING AND WATCHING BOSTON SPORTS TEAMS WIN CHAMPIONSHIPS. HE AND HIS WIFE JENNIE HAVE BEEN MARRIED FOR ELEVEN YEARS.

IN THIS ARTICLE, BRIAN GIVES US AN INSIDE GLIMPSE INTO HOW HE HAS GROWN SIGNIFICANTLY AS A LEADER FROM A BOOK HE INITIALLY DISLIKED. WE THEN GET TO LISTEN IN AS BRIAN TALKS TO THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK THAT SHAPED HIS LIFE SO PROFOUNDLY.

I first read Dr. J. Robert Clinton's *The Making of a Leader* when I was twenty years old, and I have to say that at that first reading, I took an immediate, strong dislike to it such as I cannot remember having to any other book (as we go along, you may be able to figure out why an achievement-oriented twenty-year-old might have such a strongly negative initial reaction). But a curious thing happened: whenever someone asked me to recommend a book on the topic of leadership development, I found myself—almost despite myself—recommending they read *The Making of a Leader*. After eighteen years of consistently recommending a book that I purportedly hated, I recently decided to pick up *The Making of a Leader* again to see if I could discover why it is that, against my own objections, I apparently still consider it the best book on leadership development I have ever read. Have I been wrong all of these years to dislike it, or have I made a mistake in recommending it? As you might guess from the existence of this article, I think I was wrong to dislike it. What I found upon reading the book again was a startlingly accurate, amazingly helpful, and above all, highly encouraging interpretation of what God has been doing in my life for the past 38 years, and what God will continue to do for the rest of my life (and perhaps even for eternity). What follows in the rest of this article is what we used to call in sixth grade a book report. Mostly in my own words, and occasionally adopting Dr. Clinton's terminology, I will lay out for you what I learned from reading Dr. J. Robert Clinton's *The Making of a Leader*.

The Making of a Leader was Dr. Clinton's response to what he observed as a shortage of church leaders. He and his students studied the lives of hundreds of biblical, historic, and contemporary leaders to see if they could discern the key ingredients to leadership, so that churches could focus on looking for and cultivating those key ingredients. What they discovered was that many of these hundreds of leaders shared a similar life pattern, and that a noticeable part of that pattern was that their period of greatest effectiveness came relatively late in their lives.

Before going further, it might be worthwhile to clarify what Dr. Clinton means by a leader. The leaders Dr. Clinton has in mind are not necessarily professionals. Leadership does not require particular roles, titles, or even spiritual gifts. Leadership, in Dr. Clinton's way of looking at things, is simply influencing others toward the purposes of God. What Dr. Clinton describes as a leadership development process is the process by which anyone grows and matures, with the natural outcome of that maturation process being influencing others, or leadership.

The most fundamental principle Dr. Clinton and his students learned from studying those hundreds of examples of leadership is that leadership development is a lifelong process. In other words, we spend most of our lives *becoming* leaders, not *being* leaders. I think it is this idea of lifelong leadership development to which I reacted so negatively when I first read *The Making of a Leader* as a twenty-year-old. At that time, I was restless to make an impact right away. In fact, I thought I was already making a pretty significant impact. I believed myself to be an effective leader. I was putting a great deal of effort and attention into leading others, and I could not bear the thought that somehow all of that effort did not count, that I was not a "real leader" yet.

What was too bitter for me to swallow as a twenty-year-old tastes a lot like grace to me now that I am thirty-eight. When I see the tremendous gap between what I am and what I would like to be, between what I have accomplished and what I want to accomplish, it is a tremendous relief to hear that I might still have time to get there. It is comforting for me to think that perhaps even now I am not yet expected to have everything figured out. It is exciting to consider that anything I have experienced thus far is just practice, and that my real work, the work that counts, is still to come. When you think about it, this idea that becoming a leader takes a lifetime is a hopeful prospect; it means that our college years (or any past golden era of our lives) were not our best years, but our best years are potentially always up ahead. It seems a cheerful way to look at life even when we narrow our scope to just this life. If we factor in eternity, spending a lifetime becoming a leader makes all the sense in the world. If we have all of eternity to be the leader God has designed us to be, it is a small thing to spend the first eighty years, give or take, becoming that leader. Maybe this entire life is just practice for our true work in God's eternal kingdom.

Becoming the leader we are meant to be is attainable for everyone; and when the process goes well, it continues to get better over our lifetime. But that does not mean that becoming a leader is automatic. We move forward or get stuck based on what Dr. Clinton calls the Little-Big Principle, which comes from Luke 16:10: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (TNIV). Dr. Clinton states the principle this way: "Faithfulness in a small responsibility is an indicator of probable faithfulness in a larger responsibility" (*Making of a Leader* 95). God starts us out with smaller life and leadership challenges, and gradually increases them as we demonstrate that we are capable of responding well. When we do not respond well, we remain at that level until we do—like repeating a year in school until we get a passing grade. However,

through much of our development as a leader, responding well is not necessarily about success in a ministry task. God is not primarily assessing our ability to produce results but rather our capacity for continued growth.

God's main concern is the development of our character and our gifting over time. According to Dr. Clinton, this development of character and gifting does not require any special training or fancy tools. Instead, the raw material for growth is our life experience. We build our character and develop our gifts by paying attention to significant life events. Both positive experiences (words from God, training received, ministry opportunities, successes, joyful occurrences, divine appointments, the gaining of new knowledge, supernatural events, etc.) and negative experiences (crisis, conflict, rejection, tragedy, disappointment, failure, barriers to advancement, temptation, mistakes, sin, moral failure) are equally important. The key to these experiences producing growth is reflection, asking ourselves (and God and others), "What can I learn from this experience?" or "How can I grow from this experience?"

The discipline of reflection is more important than the experience itself. A positive experience could stunt our growth if we neglect to ask ourselves what we have learned from it, and a big mistake or even a moral failing can lead us forward in our leadership development—as long as, through reflection, we learn from it what we need to learn. In other words, leadership development is not necessarily about getting it right the first time. It is about developing a habit of treating every significant event in our lives as a learning opportunity. I find this also to be very good news. My past failures—and even future ones—do not necessarily doom me to fall short of my full potential as a leader. If I continue to learn humbly from my mistakes, and if I keep getting up again after each time I fall flat on my face, by God's grace I will eventually be made into the leader God wants me to be.

So, reflection on life experiences is the general mechanism for leadership development throughout our lives. *The Making of a Leader* further breaks the life pattern of a developing leader into six major phases. Each of these six phases contains a specific set of tests or challenges most important to that phase. Because certain lessons are pertinent to certain life phases, a similar life experience might take on a different meaning depending on the life phase we are in. Thus, if we go through a similar experience several times in our lives, we might—and probably should—come out of that experience with a different answer each time to that crucial question, "What did I learn?" As the Little-Big Principle would lead us to expect, successful completion of the key tests of one life phase lead us into the next life phase, with an ever-increasing amount of responsibility and effectiveness as we move from one phase to the next.

I will briefly introduce each of the life phases, but first let me explain the age ranges I will include in each phase's description. These age suggestions are not normative. They are merely meant to give us a mental picture of the characteristics of that phase and to give us a bit of a sense of a typical pace of leadership development. There is a limitless variety in making our way through the phases. Being in your thirties, for instance, does not mean that you are in phase III; neither is it necessarily a cause for alarm if you place yourself in a stage to which I have attached a younger age than yours. Different people go through the phases at different paces. We might proceed through one phase quickly and another quite slowly. The most important thing is to proceed through the phases as we get the opportunity. Proceeding through the phases at all is not a guarantee; each of us could get stuck in any phase at any time if we do not learn the lessons of that phase.

Here are Dr. Clinton's six life phases:

Phase I—Sovereign Foundations:

The Sovereign Foundations phase is the first of three phases in which God's work is largely *in us*, not *through us*. Sovereign Foundations roughly correlates with our childhood, teens, and even our early twenties. During this phase, we are not yet fully active agents in our own lives. Someone else is more responsible for us than we are for ourselves, and we have only a very limited influence over what happens to us. Nonetheless, God is doing important work in us, quite busily forming our destiny. The building blocks of our personality and character are beginning to be put into place, although what these building blocks will be used for is not revealed until later. In other words, Sovereign Foundations is a

1. Can you hear God's voice?
2. Will you follow God's leading?
3. Will you follow your own conscience?

Hearing God, obeying him, and being a person of integrity are key tools for the reflection on our experience that is so crucial for growth throughout our lives. A temptation during this phase is restlessness. The person in Inner-Life Growth can become overeager to fulfill their calling. They want to move on to their true purpose in life and are impatient with the provisional or training roles in which they find themselves. However, giving into this restlessness merely lengthens the process. God will not move us on to the next phase until we complete the crucial tests of this one. Completion of these tests usually requires willing, patient submission to the training process. A biblical example of this phase is



time of early formative experiences, but the significance of these experiences is only clear in retrospect. The key task for this phase of life is simply to learn to respond positively to life and to God; it is a time of cultivating hopeful expectation of what is in store for us. A good biblical example of this life phase is the birth of Jesus. The infant Jesus was not doing anything himself, but many things happened to him which took on great significance later. The meaning of these destiny-establishing events was not even clear to his mother Mary, but she “treasured all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51, TNIV), waiting to see what would come of them in the future.

Phase II—Inner-Life Growth

A typical age range for Inner-Life Growth might be the twenties, even into the thirties. The developing leader moves from Sovereign Foundations to Inner-Life Growth by hearing and responding to a call to action. This call to action could be a decision to follow Jesus, or a call to ministry, or anything else that activates us. The leader in Inner-Life Growth begins to take on ministry tasks, but usually in a training capacity. The goal of this ministry is not to achieve results, nor even to develop skills, but rather to strengthen character. Inner-Life Growth is the phase in which God is most concerned with measuring our future capacity for growth. There are three crucial tests during this period:

David as a shepherd. David's final destiny was not to be a shepherd. However, he learned key lessons about trusting God and about fulfilling his duties during this time. These lessons served him well in his later life. In secret and on a much smaller stage, he developed the character he would need for his future calling.

Phase III—Ministry Maturing

Ministry Maturing would be most closely associated with a person's thirties. For clarity's sake, we will discuss Phases III, IV, and V separately, but it seems Dr. Clinton sees a long, gradual transition in which these phases overlap with one another. In Ministry Maturing, ministry becomes a major focus of life. At this point, the developing leader may begin to experience increasing fruitfulness. Nonetheless, this phase is still about becoming a leader, rather than being one. The primary aim of Ministry Maturing is to increase the leader's capacity to lead. Whereas character is the primary focus of Inner-Life Growth, gifting is the focus of Ministry Maturing.

There are two major sets of tasks for this phase, the first being the expansion and honing of ministry skills and spiritual gifts. The leader is motivated to develop skills and gifts by the fact that they have been entrusted with real responsibility for the first time. We experiment with gifts, becoming more aware of our

preferences and our aptitude. An ever greater amount of responsibility comes with faithfully and effectively meeting ministry challenges.

The second major set of tasks for this phase is to learn to work well with other people. First, we learn to submit to authority—following well being a prerequisite to leading well. We also learn to wear our own authority well, with assurance and with humility before God and others. We develop skills in managing conflict, and we practice responding graciously and effectively to leadership backlash. In all of these relational lessons, we are gaining the skills we need to work together with other people toward a common goal. This often requires setting aside ego, insecurity, hurt feelings, the desire to defend ourselves, or a thirst for revenge.

Similar to Inner-Life Growth, a big temptation of this phase is hyper-sensitivity to productivity. Even as our skills and abilities grow, it's important for us to recognize that during this phase that we are still learning what we like to do and what we do well.

There is also the very real danger that we could plateau in this phase. Many people remain in Phase III, never moving on to phases IV and V. This leveling off could happen because we stop taking new risks, because we stop learning from our experiences, because we get placed into a position which doesn't fully take advantage of our skills and gifts, because we fail to learn to follow well or lead well, or because we refuse to embrace the difficult life lessons associated with Phase IV.

Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey are examples of the Ministry Maturing phase. On that first trip, they try out different ministry strategies, use many different spiritual gifts, and gradually hone their sense of calling to be the apostles to the Gentiles.

Phase IV—Life Maturing

This phase might typically map with our forties. In this phase, we experience a mellowing and maturing of our character, and we make our way into using our gifts in an ever-more satisfying way. This phase usually begins with a more extended, intentional period of reflection on the lessons we have learned over our lives. Often, this period of reflection has to be forced upon us by life events because we otherwise are too busy doing ministry to pause and reflect. This forced pause might come in a period of isolation, a major conflict, or a life crisis. It could be that our attention is drawn away from work by the need to care for aging parents, by our children growing up, by illness, or by a major career disappointment, like not getting the promotion at which we have been aiming. One way or another, life takes over; just as we start to get good at our work, our ability to focus on our work is severely undercut. Whereas conflict is a common feature of both Ministry Maturing and Life Maturing, our response to conflict is quite different in the two phases. During Ministry Maturing, we attempt to constructively navigate conflict; during Life Maturing, we instead tend to focus on what our conflicts say about us. Overall, relationship with God starts to become far more important to us than ministry success. Ironically, as we begin to care less about the results of our ministry, our effectiveness, satisfaction, and attractiveness as ministers suddenly begins to grow. Our lives become an object of imitation. We are not merely appreciated for our work; we are admired as people. The way we have responded to difficult life circumstances make us more trustworthy models for others. The temptations during this phase are to give up (because life is too difficult) or to flame out (through some moral failure).

A good biblical picture of the Life Maturing phase comes in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (TNIV).

Phase V—Convergence

As you might guess, we could think of Convergence as typically starting sometime in our fifties. This phase is when it all comes together. The leader is finally moved into a role that matches their gifting, experience, temperament, and other factors. Life lessons and ministry lessons are aligned correctly, and everything just seems to work right. We are freed to do what we do best, and our impact is maximized. The leader in Convergence embodies in current life all the lessons of the previous phases. A key task in reaching and maintaining Convergence is the development of a personal philosophy of ministry. This philosophy of ministry is a combination of biblical values, mission suited to time and place (or being in the time and place that fits our mission), and an incorporation of our unique gifts and life story. Very few people experience Convergence. For those who do, the temptation is to cease adapting. Since circumstances change, remaining in Convergence takes frequent adjustments of our philosophy of ministry. It is these adjustments that keep us in our sweet spot.

Daniel in the time of King Darius is a good biblical example of Convergence. He quickly and easily rises to the top of Darius' administration. He is placed in a role that exactly suits his abilities. He operates in a very wide sphere of influence, and he is scarcely fazed by the schemes of his enemies.

Phase VI—Afterglow

Afterglow is an extra bonus phase for a very small number of people. It takes a lifetime of faithfulness, along with longevity and a bit of good fortune, to experience Afterglow. It is a period of semi-retirement in which fruitfulness and satisfaction are experienced out of proportion with current effort. The leader in Afterglow is reaping the dividends of a lifetime of ministry and growth. These Afterglow leaders have usually handed off the key leadership roles to a succeeding generation, yet they still exert indirect influence at broad levels. They do not have to go out to find work. Others seek them out because of their reputation. A good biblical example of Afterglow might be Jacob in Egypt. Joseph was the formal leader of the family by that point, but Jacob's influence was still seen in the blessings he passed on to future generations.



Book Recommendation

The Making of a Leader by J. Robert Clinton

A man wearing a plaid shirt is sitting on a wooden surface, possibly a table or bench, against a brick wall. He is looking down and has his hands clasped. The lighting is warm and focused on him. On the right side of the image, there are three overlapping light blue circles of varying sizes. In the bottom right corner, there is a small white circle containing the text 'page 6'.

BRIAN HOUSMAN

Interviewing

BOBBY CLINTON

BRIAN TALKS WITH BOBBY ABOUT HIS RESEARCH ON *THE MAKING OF A LEADER*.

BH: People have said that knowing about the development process you outline in *The Making of a Leader* is very encouraging. Why do you think that just knowing about it is so helpful?

BC: A few things. One, whenever you have long-term perspective, it can keep you from being blind-sided. You can respond the way God wants you to if you have some idea of what is coming next. Two, recognizing that many people have gone through the things you are going through is encouraging. For example, 90% of all leaders go through isolation.

God uses that in their lives to develop them. If you know this, your experience of isolation will be easier to comprehend.

BH: Seeing it has worked out well in someone else's life makes it a bit more normative. You know something horribly wrong hasn't happened to you.

BC: Yes, everybody else goes through these things, and God uses them.

BH: In some emails we exchanged, you talked a

little bit about things you've been learning since you wrote *The Making of a Leader*. One thing you've emphasized is social base processing. What is social base processing?

BC: The social base is the place where the leader bases his or her life—a home with a family, or if they are single, wherever they live and spend much of their time.

As we continued to study, we identified seven major barriers to growth. One of the things that we saw is

that five of the seven barriers flow out of the social base. That is, the growth of a leader is often limited by the social base. For example, their emotional life is not taken care of, or their marriage is strained. Missionaries or bivocational workers often have quite a bit of economic strain. Social base processing is how we deal with these things. How we manage our needs and relationships in the area of our social base will have a profound influence on getting past growth barriers.

BH: So we might be tempted to rush ahead toward our leadership tasks without making sure that we are relationally equipped. These are fundamental needs that need to be met if we are going to succeed.

BC: Right, and there is no ideal pattern. Patterns shift over time, and you need to be aware of that. If you are aware of that, you can proactively move toward the pattern that best fits you (and your spouse if you are married). This is going to greatly influence the strategic impact you are going to have in life.

BH: Tell me more about mentoring. Why is it so important? How do you find good mentors? What do you do with them?

BC: After studying hundreds of lives of successful leaders, one of the things that people consistently mentioned were people who helped them. Many people would list eight to even twelve people along their timeline. We identified nine mentor functions and wrote a book on this called *Connecting*.

BH: Do people tend to need these functions in a similar order, or does it change from person to person?

BC: There are some consistent things. For example, when a person goes into a new ministry, they generally need some coaching help from somebody who has been there, done it, and been successful in it. Toward the end of life, historical mentoring becomes important. As you study the lives of people who finish well, it can inspire you and encourage you and give you some insights. You generally need discipling early on. But some people who didn't get disciplined may need it when they are already in ministry somewhere. Whenever you need to move into a new phase, you need a sponsor that can open doors for you and move you along.

BH: Mentoring is a strong hunger for people. People say, "I really want a mentor," but they don't have a

very accurate idea of what they want. They have a vague picture in mind of someone much older and wise, something like Yoda from *Star Wars*, perhaps. Talk about the realities of mentoring. What can you really expect from a mentor, and what are you looking for?

BC: You are not going to find an ideal mentor. What we have found is that mentors have a mentor-mix. So of these nine mentor functions, a given mentor may do three of them. The idea is not to look for an ideal mentor. Think about what you specifically need help in. As opposed to looking for a mentor for life, you look for a mentor who can help you over the next three to five months so you can learn whatever it is you need.

BH: You say that between 35-55 is when many people plateau and stop growing. What are the challenges there?

BC: For one, by the time you are 35 or 38, if you have had any kind of pulpit ministry, or Bible teaching ministry, you have built up a repertoire of the good things to use. So the tendency is to plateau and not go for new things, and not study the Bible to help you. If you study the Bible at all, it's doing some sort of sermon or series or seminar or something along the way. There is a lack of learning posture toward the Bible that hits in the mid 30s and 40s.

The other thing that hits in the 40s is, frequently you have that mid-career kind of thing that is written up in the secular world. The same thing happens in the Christian world: you are not satisfied or you are in a rut. That opens up to events like David and Bathsheba. In the late 30s and 40s there are lots of pitfalls, like sexuality gone bad, the home is not as good as it ought to be, ministry is no longer that exciting, you do it to get money out of it, or you have lost that drive. That happens all the way to 55.

In the 50s, you also have physical problems. You don't take care of yourself as you ought to. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 in his mid-50s. His basic thrust was that he needed discipline in his life. He didn't want to not finish well after he had recruited so many people to get in the battle with him. That is what the middle game is about. That is why peer accountability and mentors are important in these times. Other people face these kind of problems, and it is helpful to know somebody who can give insight on it, can challenge you, maybe someone who can exhort you before you go under.

BH: The biggest challenge, it sounds like you are saying, of that middle game is keeping yourself interested, challenged, learning, being humble, growing.

BC: Yes, learning is important. The other thing is to recognize that you need repeated renewals, not like the big deal when you were 32 or something. You are going to need God to meet you again and again, as he did Abraham and Daniel. Sometimes the renewals come serendipitously—you don't have anything to do with them, God just does them. Sometimes it flows out of spiritual discipline; you spend some time to try to get God to meet you in renewal.

BH: What advice would you give to church planters who are getting started and want to make it for the long haul?

BC: First, you really need to know who you are, your core being, your relationship with God. It has to do with intimacy and how God has shaped your conscience, the character that he has built into you, your personality. You need to know who that is. You can't imitate somebody else. You have got to be you.

Church planters also need to know that they are in a particular time in their life in which God is shaping their character quite a bit. That is part of what I meant by "ministry flows out of being." Mostly God is shaping character in those early years. They are doing good ministry, and things are happening, so sometimes they don't recognize that the most important thing is what God is doing in them. They can be doing some good things, seeing lots of things happen, and having success in ministry, but the most important thing is to recognize what God is doing in their own life.



Book Recommendation

Connecting: by Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton

SURVIVING

Tragedy

LE QUE HEIDKAMP INTERVIEWS LANCE PITTLUCK



LANCE PITTLUCK IS CURRENTLY THE PASTOR OF THE ANAHEIM VINEYARD AND A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL BOARD OF THE VINEYARD USA. PRIOR TO TAKING OVER ANAHEIM VINEYARD, LANCE PLANTED A VINEYARD CHURCH IN LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK. HE HOLDS A MASTERS OF DIVINITY FROM FULLER SEMINARY IN CALIFORNIA. WE INTERVIEWED LANCE ABOUT THE DEATH OF HIS YOUNG SON IN 1997 AND HOW HIS FAMILY AND MINISTRY SURVIVED THAT TRAGEDY.

LH: Can you tell us about what happened to your son?

LP: On a Thursday afternoon, my son was sick and we took him to the doctor. The doctor said he had the flu, it was going around, don't worry about it. Then Saturday night, his breathing got kind of strange. All of a sudden, his eyes rolled back and he went unconscious. We tried to resuscitate him—there was a nurse living across the street from us, she came over and tried to resuscitate him. We called 911, they took him away in the ambulance to the hospital, but he was already gone. What they said later was they think that he got a strep virus on top of the flu. Some forms of strep are very deadly; they can

make your whole system go what they call septic which means it poisons your whole system. So one minute we have this healthy strong little three year old boy—very athletic and active, built like a little linebacker—and suddenly he's gone. It was completely shocking. Obviously nothing you would ever anticipate happening.

So my wife Cheryl went into shock, crawled up into a fetal position and stayed there for about two or three days, crying uncontrollably. I wasn't quite that out of it, but I went into a period that lasted about 6 weeks of the rawest emotional pain that I have ever experienced. Nothing else has come even close. I

lost my mom when she was really young, but this was nothing like that because even though my mom died young, it was at least in order. Your parents are supposed to die before you do. When you lose a child, everything feels wrong about it.

Cheryl and I weren't helpful to each other at all because we were both in such pain that we made each other feel worse, so we both needed to tap our support systems. When I look back now to that time, my most positive memory of it was people flying in from all over the country just to be with us. We got calls from all over the world, all the people that we had ministered to over the years. That was really the

beautiful part of it. But the internal part of it was just this raw pain that wouldn't go away.

I was angry and needed a physical relief, so for about six weeks I would go in the morning to the gym and work out, lift weights, things like that, to deal with the physical part. I'm a big journaler, and I like to write. I would come home from the gym after getting the physical release part done and I would write sometimes for two or three hours. I was not writing for anybody else, I was just prayer writing, trying to process what happened.

LH: At what point in ministry and church life was this all happening to you?

LP: Well, we had planted a church in 1984 and so we had been at the church for 13 years. The church was wonderful for the most part. They just rallied around us. Our son was an active little kid, and it was almost like he was the kid of the whole church. They took care of us for a couple of weeks. We really couldn't do much for ourselves. By that time, people had flown in from all over the place. It was a weird thing; our house had probably 30 or 40 people there all the time. That was good and bad and hard all at the same time because at times we felt like hosts for this big party that we didn't want to have.

LH: When people were flying in, calling you and talking to you, what did they do or say that was helpful? What wasn't so helpful?

LP: There's not a lot good to say. Everybody's attempts at theologizing were not helpful. You know, "Well, God allowed this but God didn't cause this." All of those distinctions fall right away. The people who were most helpful were a couple on our staff who had lost their 14-year-old daughter a number of years before. They just sort of got it. It's like a club that you don't want to get in, but when you are in it you at least understand to some degree what the other people are going through. They just mostly sat with us and prayed with us, didn't offer a lot of advice.

People said very stupid things to us during the time. I had a guy at my son's memorial service offer me his latest dreams and ask me to interpret them. Everything in me wanted to clock him. Everybody means well and the smart ones don't really say too much. They offer to pray for you and do whatever they can do. Especially in the beginning stages you are so hurt, so confused, there is no way that anything somebody can say is going to pull you out of that, or fix it.

LH: So what did happen to get you out of it?

LP: I think partly it was just a matter of time. I remember distinctly at six weeks there being a difference. And the difference was, at six weeks it started to feel a little bit more broken up. Meaning it was sporadic. I wasn't in pain all day long. I was still in pain throughout the day at different times, but it started to be more broken up. And throughout the next year, it started to get more and more sporadic so that I wasn't just focused on the pain all the time. All the typical stages of grief that you go through in a loss, those all came and went. You get angry and then you feel sad and so on. They don't happen in order. You bounce back and forth between all of them.

LH: Do you think there were any particularly unique challenges to the fact that this happened while you were a pastor of a church and typically on the side of someone who is offering advice or encouragement?

LP: One of the hardest things about ministry is you have to live your life in front of everybody. You have talked to these people for 13 years now about trusting God in every circumstance in your life. And now they are looking at you going, "Let's see how this works out." I don't think anybody was really thinking that, but they are looking at you and going "Okay, how is this couple that's been preaching and teaching to us for all this time going to live at this most crucial time in their life?"

It is painful to go through something like this, no matter who you are, but being a pastor is a complicating factor. I actually chose to preach through most of the time because I felt like it was something that happened to the whole church, and just to disappear didn't feel right. I chose to be with them and be pretty honest about how I was feeling. I didn't make every church service a group therapy session, but I would report to them where we were at and what was happening. I think that ended up being a really healthy thing.

LH: What would you say to church planters and pastors that could help them be more prepared for dealing with this kind of personal tragedy and difficulty? Is there anything?

LP: Build your support system in the good times, because when the bad times come, they will be there for you. That really turned out to be true. Not just the people in the church in New York, but the people throughout the Vineyard and around the world that we had given our lives to. They all really rallied to us. You reap what you sow. We really did reap a harvest of relationship and friendships that we had invested in for probably 20 years. There is nothing that can prepare you for this, but if you

want to survive it you have to maintain a really good relationship with God and have friends that you can walk life out with. I didn't really enjoy being around people that I didn't know before at all. People I liked having around were people I was very comfortable with and that I had walked with for a long time.

A lot of people sent me materials, most of which was not very helpful. The one thing I found that I would recommend to people is there is an old Scottish pastor named Samuel Rutherford. He was an old Presbyterian pastor, and he lost all his children to childhood diseases in the 1700s. He took up a ministry of comforting people who lost their children. There is a book of letters that are written to people he is trying to help through their own process of losing their children. That book was far superior to everything modern that I had read. The other book that I really enjoyed was C.S. Lewis's "A Grief Observed." Most of the modern stuff was garbage.

There was a crucial point for me at my son's memorial service where I was in the service and some well-meaning person put my son's picture right in front of me. I remember thinking, I have a choice here, I can crawl up inside myself and die, or I can, even though I don't understand this, I can choose to worship. I felt God challenging me to worship. I lifted up one hand, that was about as much as I could get, because I couldn't sing. If I opened my mouth I would start crying. I lifted up my hand and when I did, I felt the presence of the Lord come on me in a comforting, reassuring way. Like, "There is going to be grace for this." From that point forward, while it wasn't that the pain all went away that day, or I was totally okay, but the whole idea of grace being sufficient really ended up sustaining me. I could feel this sustaining grace undergirding and holding me up through the whole thing.



Book Recommendations



A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis



Grace in Winter: Rutherford in Verse by Faith Cook



GETTING OUT OF THE INSECURITY

Trap

Michael and Brenda Gatlin pastor the fast-growing Duluth Vineyard and are the regional church planting overseers for the Midwest Region of Vineyard USA. They are also well-known as church planting coaches. Jeff Heidkamp, the editor of this magazine, was coached by the Gatlins during Mercy Vineyard Church's early years. We sat down for a long lunch at a pretty bad restaurant in Duluth, Minnesota and talked about one of the most important things I have learned from them over the years: the dangers of insecurity.

CE: You've both often said that insecurity is one of the great dangers for pastors and leaders. Tell me why.

BG: Part of leading people is having to confront them and speak the truth in love. The truth can hurt, and it will be hard to speak if you're always afraid of being

Wimber talked about how you have to burp people in leadership. Everybody gets upset and frustrated by change sometimes, and you just pull them close, love on them a little bit, and say, "I know. Change is hard. All these new people coming to church. This is painful but—*burp*." And then they feel better.

When I'm feeling insecure, I find myself bailing on things that God said to do. In the midst of the meeting, in a one-on-one confrontation or while presenting vision, I undersell or soft-sell it. I find myself searching for different language and a different way to do it that isn't so strong.

rejected. You'll be obsessed with how people think about you and you'll never be honest about what you're saying to them. The focus has to be on Jesus and on what's good for this person. We have to be willing to take whatever risk we need to in order to help them connect with Jesus. If they don't like us, that's cool. If you're insecure you'll never do that.

Just this week I had to pull somebody out of their leadership role because they have so much brokenness in their life. They got furious at me and sent me emails saying, "I can't believe you! Didn't you know this would devastate me?" I said, "Well, I did know that this would devastate you, but I still have to be honest and walk away knowing I've done the right thing as a leader and as a pastor." And they emailed me back after three days of storming and said, "Forgive me for being so childish and immature. You were right. I do know you love me. I do want to grow." But if I was insecure I never would have done that.

CE: How does insecurity play out when someone criticizes your leadership?

MG: You start by sensing that you have a direction from God as a pastor or a leader. You've prayed and thought about it. You begin to float the idea out there and then people begin to react negatively to it and you immediately change your mind and think, "Well it must not be God." And so you pull back rather than being a leader and leading them through the change.

CE: How might a young leader recognize insecurity in his or her own life? How might they come to a realization that it's there and needs to be dealt with?

MG: One of the ways you recognize insecurity is realizing you're thinking a lot about yourself. Insecure leaders constantly come to me and say, "What do you think of me?" And the secure leaders are coming to me saying, "How do I reach these people? How do I do ministry better?" The insecure leaders are wondering what I think about them, and they're constantly asking me about it.

BG: I think that everything feels way more risky when you're insecure. It feels like you're taking a huge personal risk, there's a lot at stake, and this might cost too much. That's a good red flag that perhaps you are overly focused on how people perceive you.

MG: When I'm feeling insecure, I find myself bailing on things that God said to do. In the midst of the meeting, in a one-on-one confrontation or while presenting vision, I undersell or soft-sell it. I find myself searching for different language and a different way to do it that isn't so strong.

CE: Where does insecurity come from?

BG: It comes from not understanding what God believes about you. From not having his eyes to see yourself the way that God sees you. God's eyes don't puff us up and they don't demean us. They're just right on. They see us exactly as we are for who we are, what we're for, and what

we're meant to be and do. But we don't have God's eyes because of our past experiences, because of old wounds, or because of words that have been spoken over us verbally.

It comes from believing the lies of the enemy and not knowing how to turn away from them. A good prayer to pray every day is, "Father, who do you say I am?" And if you're connecting with him and he's writing that script on your heart and your mind, then you're going to walk around in the truth rather than lies. And when somebody gets mad at you, you find yourself thinking, "You know what? It doesn't really matter what you think because I know who God says I am today."

CE: I'm hearing two things. There's a healing component—you're insecure because you've been hurt. And then there's a spiritual discipline component, where our beliefs have to get down into our character.

MG: One of the prayers that I pray every day—it's not really a prayer, it's more of a reminding myself of what's true—it goes like this: "Abba is really, really fond of me." I remind myself of that all the time. Every day that's one of the ways I start. Abba's really fond of me. I'm really fond of Abba. Abba likes me a lot.

BG: When God writes something on your heart and deposits his words, there's something about it that has a spiritual, powerful impact on us that is different than if I pat you on the back and say, "No, you really are a great guy, Jeff." That wears off really quick. But if God says to you, "Jeff, let me tell you who you are in my eyes," then you listen, believe, embrace, and walk in it. You get it from hearing what God thinks about you. Then you start to do pretty crazy things for God.

CE: What happens to the leader who realizes they've been leading out of insecurity for years, and they finally turn to Jesus?

BG: I'll tell you one thing—they are tired. They're exhausted because of how much work it is to manage all those relationships and make people think what they want them to think. That's a lot of work. Every room you're in you're just workin' it, workin' it, workin' it. Now they realize, "I don't have to be in control anymore. Jesus is in control of what people think of me." So they get refreshed and they're not so tired. Then, they start to have a heck of a lot more fun.

MG: You're able to have real friendships because people can be friends with you, rather than friends with the person that you are projecting. Wouldn't you like to be able to be honest and transparent with who you are? Then your friends are really your friends. You can let down your guard.


CE: People who have overcome insecurity can get trapped in it again. Things happen that will make you want to clam up again. Things happen that are going to make you get self-centered again. Can you think about some things that cause people to go back into their shell, go back into their self-centeredness? How can people avoid that?

MG: The reason for it is, every time Jesus identifies a new thing in your life, you have to risk everything to follow him. You never lose that. When you first surrendered to Christ, you risked everything. You gave up everything you had to get his life. What I've discovered is, every step along the way, you're giving up everything you have up to that point to get the new life. It never, ever, ever changes. We stop because we don't want to risk it all to go to the next step. I always feel like my toes are hanging off the edge of a precipice and the next step is like Indiana Jones stepping into the thin air. I feel that way every single time. You're risking everything to get healing in this area.

BG: I find that incredibly freeing because then I don't have to protect myself. All I can do is fall on his mercy, saying, "Apart from you I can do nothing, but with you I can do this again, even if I hurt." But we're so busy trying to avoid pain that we're not thinking about the God who's going to heal us and pick us up and put our feet back on the rock. You have to go into ministry understanding, "I'm gonna get hurt, I'm gonna get healed, I'm gonna get poured out. That's my cycle."

MG: It was Jesus' cycle too.



A photograph of a man and a woman sitting together in a field of tall grass at sunset. The woman is on the left, wearing a pink jacket and glasses, smiling. The man is on the right, wearing a dark jacket and glasses, with his arm around her. The background is a warm, golden sunset sky over a field.

*Flourishing marriages
Flourishing churches*

A graphic consisting of two overlapping circles in shades of blue, positioned in the bottom left corner of the page.

JEFF HEIDKAMP INTERVIEWS CINDY NICHOLSON

Cindy Nicholson is one of the pastors at Evanston Vineyard. She and her husband Steve are the national church planting task force coordinators for Vineyard USA. Cindy and Steve have been involved in every facet of church planting for decades and are widely respected for their leadership and wisdom. We asked Cindy to share her thoughts about how marriages can thrive amid the intensity of church planting.

CE: What are some of the unique challenges that church planting couples face?

CN: Well, there's a degree of buy-in that both spouses have to have regardless of who is playing the lead role, or whether they both are. The only profession that requires a similar level of buy-in is the medical profession, where they are going to be on-call a lot. And possibly there's a degree of buy-in that someone who is in a business where they are going to be posted overseas, whether they are with the government or with a company.

But if your spouse works at Bank of America or the local hardware store, the effect on the private life of the couple is at least somewhat controllable and fairly voluntary. In ministry, it's not so. Even if you keep a good grip on things like evening meetings and days off, you are going to have a lot of people in your life all the time to an extent which is not true of most other professions. While it is not necessarily true that if one spouse is in ministry, both spouses are in ministry, the reality is that regardless of what role each decides to play, there's no healthy way to keep a rigid boundary between the church and the family life.

CE: Talk about how this plays out in decisions about how to spend time.

CN: It is really helpful if communication about time starts early and continues regularly. Steve and I started communicating about it before we got married, in the same way that we talked about expectations for time we were going to spend with our extended families. Or which way we rolled the toilet paper, if anybody cared. Because no two couples solve the time question the same, some of it will depend on the wiring of both the husband and the wife. Does being with people energize them or does it drain them? What is their daily or weekly need for "cave time" or "just the two of us time"?

Newly married couples have theories, college experiences or family relationships to give them clues about communicating. One of the funny and painful parts of

the first year of marriage is figuring out how those theories relate to reality. I always thought I was way introverted until Steve and I were invited to a goodbye party for a group leader who was leaving. We were sitting out in the car in front of a party and Steve said, "I want to be here half an hour and then I want to start saying our goodbyes and getting out of here."

I looked at him and thought, "I will hardly have my coat off in a half an hour! I'd actually like to talk to these people! I like some of these people! Why are you being so cranky?" We hadn't been married long enough for me to realize that he had hit his quota for the week. It was Friday, he'd had umpteen intense conversations, and a half an hour was as much grace as he had. And he did that half an hour beautifully. He engaged, he was warm, he said, "Goodbye, God bless you, this is what we saw in your time here that was so valuable to us, we know you'll be great in this next setting," and he was done. I could've kept going for an hour and a half.

We had to learn how to communicate about that. It becomes more interesting as you change roles over the years, as spouses are working and then they are not working, when you add children and the isolation that can come, or the busyness that can come if you are doing both roles. So, communicating about time requires regular upkeep and management. It's not a conversation you have once.

It's also important to be aware that in those first two years of planting, you are living outrageously. You are living in a way you can't sustain and don't want to sustain past that amount of time. It's really important for the couple to talk that through thoroughly enough so that neither is living in any state of unreality about what life's going to be like. It is hard even when you are both on the same page. It is not uncommon that the spouse not taking the lead hadn't really bought into it completely, and at about nine months in, turns on the church planter. So the work on the front end is so worth it for planters, especially because of that dynamic.

Church planting is not one of the easiest things you could ever do with your life, and it is certainly one of the most challenging things you can do as a married couple. But in my experience, nothing beats—short of birthing or adopting babies—being right in the middle of seeing a new community of faith come into being, grow strong, and start to impact the wider community around it. It can be one of the most glorious things that a couple can ever experience together.

CE: Does the expectation need to be communicated in specific terms, like nights per week, hours per day, days per month?

CN: The more intuitive types don't exactly do it that way, but they end up in the same place. They just do it the same way people who cook by feel and texture and taste do. They just know when it's right, and they can communicate "ah ha! this is just right, right now" or "this feels really bad, we need to refigure things."

CE: Another way in which planting presents unique marital issues is when there are conflicts within the church. Especially when it is smaller, they can feel much more dramatic for the couple. How does that play out in marriage?

CN: There are a few things. One of them I definitely learned the hard way. I never realized the degree to which people would try to get to Steve through me. They would try to send little messages through me, because they did not want to have the straight-out conversation with him. They would say, "Cindy, can I talk to you?" and I would think, "Oh! I'm so honored that they would talk to me." They would go through the whole thing with me and all their objections, and sometimes they would flat out say, "Will you just talk to Steve about this?" Sometimes they wouldn't even necessarily say that out loud, but I would still go back to him.

The problem is that I would go into that conversation with their load in my voice. Now, not only is Steve having a difficulty with them, but he's having the same difficulty with his wife and doesn't know why. This is not a gendered issue. I have seen settings where the husband and wife co-pastor the church or where the wife pastors the church and people will do the same thing with the husband.

They'll just go for the one they think will give them a softer reception. I had to learn to stop them and say, "Wait a minute, I think you credit me with more responsibility in this situation than I have. This is a conversation that you need to have directly with Steve." If they start up again, I would have to stop them and say, "No, I am sorry, really, I cannot listen to this. It's not going to serve any useful purpose. Here's the number at the office. Please call Steve. He'll listen to anybody."

CE: There are a lot of different ways a husband and wife can relate as leaders of a church. They can be co-leaders or one can take the lead, and in a model where one takes the lead, there are a lot of different possible roles for the other spouse. Can you talk a little bit about how to figure that out?

CN: It is very helpful for both spouses, when they are thinking about church planting, to do some work to figure out what they are made for, what their passions are, what their gifts are, what God has spoken to them about, where they have experienced success in ministry, what gives them satisfaction, and so on.

If they have done this groundwork, they will be less easily forced into being somebody they are not. Granted, in a church plant everybody is a utility player, and you end up doing a certain number of things that you are not particularly good at just to get off the ground. But, someone who doesn't exactly know what they are for can end up getting stuck in roles that become forced on them as the church grows. They have a hard time getting out of it and it can lead to resentment.

Not every church planter is married to someone who is a leader. To have that person be handed the expectation that she or he will lead things is damaging. If he or she is clear about gifting and calling, is content in that, able to articulate it, understands how that complements their spouse, and how it helps the team, then both of them can articulate it over and over again as the church is forming.

For instance, Steve's parents took over what was, for all intents and purposes, a church plant. My mother-in-law was very clear and her husband was behind her—and this was in a church setting where the expectations were pretty darn rigid—she said, “You do not want me organizing your Sunday school, and I am not the best person to run your women's ministry. But, I play piano and I play organ and if you don't have a choir director, I will be happy to organize the choir. I can do that with my eyes closed.” So she did. And because she was clear and because her husband was clear, people fussed and fumed for a few weeks and then they got over it. She was an incredible choir director, she was happy, and their family life was happy because she wasn't spending hours every week doing something she was terrible at and feeling bad about herself.

CE: What are some of the challenges and opportunities for some of the spouses who are co-leading, doing it together as equal partners?

CN: Some couples are uniquely wired to do this very well. It is the way that they tend to do life, run their home, and parent their children. They are happiest when they are teamed up together like that. Often they are people who process externally, although not always. They really like talking about church and it doesn't feel like a drain on their family time to be talking, strategizing, and dreaming together. They are really good at knowing and being protective of each other's weaknesses and making room for each other's strengths. They tend to be good at complementary things.

It is very difficult for two very highly catalytic people who need to be the vision casters to do this together. It is not that they don't both cast vision but that they aren't both vying to cast THE vision, if you will. Unless they are totally on the same page, that gets really hard.

Another one of the challenges is knowing how you work together. We have friends who planted a church in England. Her passion and gifting relates a lot to social justice and care for the poor. They knew that they wanted to plant their church in such a way that right from the start included a night shelter for homeless men and women and then a discipleship house for any of those people who came to know Jesus in the process. So right from the start, he was working on the pastoral leaders for the church and she was identifying and recruiting and training the leaders for the project that was going along the side. They were both talking to their leaders and helping them understand how these two visions worked together. So there was twice as much leadership training going on. There were two people with their eyes out there all the time trying to identify and recruit new leaders, and they were talking to each other about it all the time.

CE: There are a number of single people thinking about planting churches. What are some of the key issues if you are going to plant a church single?

CN: Churches have been planted by single people since day one and there is no reason for that to stop. A single planter will need a strong supply of people who aren't relating to them as the pastor because, especially in the first stage

while the church plant is growing, it is very confusing to date people in the church plant. That is a position of unequal power.

A church planter also has to have emotional support. One of the things that makes planters fry out before they have gotten the church planted is that they don't have anybody with whom they can do fun stuff that replenishes them, and they don't have people with whom they can speak unguardedly, who can pray for them, or who can say the hard things to them that they can receive knowing that they are loved and not judged. There ought to be enough of them that if life circumstances take a few of those people out of action, the planter won't be out there hanging by their thumbs.

The advantage for the planter, if they are not married, is that their time is more their own. They don't have to have the aforementioned conversation about how to spend family time. The caution is that they do need to think about replenishment and have a plan for it. They are not going to have a spouse there making sure they do their plan, so they have to be a bit of a self-starter in that area. It also means that their coach and friends need to stay on them about it. We had a couple guys plant out of our church while they were still single and Steve would say to them over and over, “Are you taking your day off?” Without somebody there to start climbing down your throat if this is the third week in a row you haven't quite gotten around to taking your day off, it is really easy for someone who is single to let that go. So that is something they and their coaching friends need to keep their eye on.

CE: Is there anything else you want to say about church planting and marriage?

CN: I know that we have been discussing some of the things that are intrinsically hard on a marriage. Church planting is not one of the easiest things you could ever do with your life, and it is certainly one of the most challenging things you can do as a married couple. But in my experience, nothing beats—short of birthing or adopting babies—being right in the middle of seeing a new community of faith come into being, grow strong, and start to impact the wider community around it. It can be one of the most glorious things that a couple can ever experience together no matter how they have divvied up the job descriptions. There is just nothing like it. It is one of the unique privileges of getting called to church planting as part of your life's work



Book Recommendations

Worship, Community and the Triune God
James Torrance



SPIRITUAL

Growth

IN THE LIFE OF A LEADER

BERT WAGGONER, NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF VINEYARD CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES DISCUSSES THE NATURE OF LIFELONG SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The holistic nature of personal growth

Let me begin by establishing this simple assumption: personal growth is holistic. We grow physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, theologically, and relationally. We cannot separate these from one another; they are interdependent. Right from the start we must be committed to give attention to all aspects of growth and not think that any aspect can come to maturity without caring for the others.

There is no aspect of our personal growth that is more vital than growth in relationships. Our relationships are the driving force that shapes who we are and who we will become as leaders. If this is true, it is easy to see why we should make it our highest priority to nurture and develop our relationships.

Growth in relationship with the triune God

First, we must grow in our relationship with the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The relationship with God is a relationship with all three members of the holy Trinity. Sometimes there can be a problem in spiritual development due to all the focus being on one member of the Trinity—e.g. within Evangelicalism, the Son; within the Pentecostal/Charismatic context, the Holy Spirit; or within historical Protestantism, the Father. Our growth in relationship with God must be with the Father, and with the Son, and with the Spirit. Our growth takes place in the dynamic of love that exists in this divine community.

The basic pattern for prayer and worship in the New Testament is to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. This is not the only pattern the New Testament models, but whatever the pattern, it always implies the Trinity of persons. Our God is a triune God. That is the only God that can be known through Jesus Christ. When we pray to Jesus, the Father and Spirit are present in Him. When we pray to the Father, the Son and the Spirit are present in Him, and likewise for the Son and the Spirit. This is the relationship theologians call the *perichoresis*. Jesus puts it this way, “Father, just as I am in you

and you in me...” (John 17:21). So when we pray and worship it is never a solo relationship with the Father or the Son or the Spirit. Prayer always brings us into relationship with the eternal community—the triune God.

Knowing that I am in the presence of this divine community is very significant to me. It is like sitting with a group of friends—first speaking to one and then the other according to the primary roles they play in the total plan of redemption, always knowing that as I address one, the other members are also present in the conversation and that in the course of the relationship, first one will speak to me, then another, and I in turn will speak to them. This focus on and experience of the various members of the Godhead is evident in Paul’s spirituality (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Romans 14:17-18; Galatians 3:11-14; 4:6 and others). The trinitarian relationship comes out in his doxologies and his theological arguments. This is the kind of relationship with God in which I am endeavoring to grow. It is the foundation for all of my prayer life and personal growth.

Growth in relationship with the Kingdom of God

Coinciding with our growth in relationship with the triune God is growth in relationship with the Kingdom of God. Actually, the Trinity and the Kingdom of God are so closely related that it is almost as if they are the same thing from different perspectives. To be in the triune God is to be in the Kingdom of God and vice-versa. But it is important for us to consciously relate to the dynamics of the Kingdom of God. We need to grow in our experience of God’s love and power. It is important to be consciously aware that we are living in the powers of the age to come, caught in the vortex of the coming kingdom.

The experience of God’s love being poured into our hearts is our most important area of growth. There is nothing that a leader needs to grow in more than in the conscious experience of the Kingdom of God as love (Romans 5:5). I personally missed this emphasis on the kingdom as experienced love in my earlier years. I knew the Spirit experientially

primarily as the Spirit of power but not as love. Then I began to see that just as the primary dynamic within the Trinity is love, the experience of God’s love is also the primary dynamic in the kingdom. Since coming into that awareness I have been on a continual quest of growth in the experience of God’s love.

The Kingdom of God also comes as the kingdom of power. Love and power should not be set in contrast with one another. The power that is expressed in the Kingdom of God is the power to love God and others (1 Corinthians 13). It is not a naked power that can be used for one’s own advantage. It is an experience that gives courage to believe that we can do all things through the Spirit that is within us. We must all grow in the conscious awareness of God’s kingdom by the ever-increasing experience of the power of God.

Growth in relationship with others

Finally, we must grow in our ability to relate to others. I say “finally” because growing in human relationships should come out of and follow the development of our relationship with God and His kingdom. The Trinity provides analogy for the development of human relationships. We were made in God’s image as relational creatures. The Trinity provides us with a model of how human relationships should be structured, and the experience of God’s kingdom provides the motivation and power for those relationships.

Paul clearly states that the greatest evidence of authentic spirituality is to love. Love cannot be done in the abstract. It can only be done when we engage in human relationships. 1 Corinthians 13 calls us to make it our highest human endeavor, to grow in our social skills and thus in our ability to relate to others, and to build communities of love. We would not do injustice to the text if we replaced “love” with “relationship building” because that is what love is. Nothing is more important—the greatest thing is love. We can grow in all other aspects of our life, but if we do not grow in our ability to relate, everything else is zero, including tongues, miracles, and prophecies.

The experience of God's love being poured into our hearts is our most important area of growth. There is nothing that a leader needs to grow in more than in the conscious experience of the Kingdom of God as love.

Intellectual and theological growth

I have been speaking primarily of relational growth, but there is one further aspect of growth that I believe is vital to every Christian, and especially to leaders of the flock. This is an area of growth that is often denigrated in forms of spirituality that have been influenced by Gnostic thinking and a kind of spirit/nature dualism. The idea in these schools of thought is that the mind, due to the fact that it is material, is evil, and the only true knowledge of God is that which comes through mystical experiences. The area of growth these Gnostic forms of spirituality have denigrated is intellectual and theological growth.

The Bible does not divide a person into parts. Its purpose is not to provide us with a biblical psychology. So when it uses the language of body, soul, spirit, mind, heart etc., it is speaking of aspects rather than parts of a person. But even more fundamentally, it is speaking of the entire person—whatever it is the person consists of. Thus, when Jesus (and Moses) said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37), he was saying to love God with all you have and are. This greatest commandment, though it includes more than this, certainly includes loving God with the intellect. Since God is the greatest subject of human thought, there is nothing that is nobler for the human mind than to think lofty, inspiring, edifying thoughts of God and His relationship with His world. To do this we must become lifetime students who are always in the process of growing theologically and intellectually.

Signs of stagnation in growth

What are some signs that we have stopped growing? There are many, but let me list some of the most evident ones. We are probably not growing in our relationship with God if there is not

an ever-increasing experience of the triune God. We are probably not growing in the experience of the kingdom if there is not an ever-increasing experience of God's love and power. We are probably not growing in relationship with others if we are not deepening our relationships with others and bringing new and different people into our circle of relationships. We are probably not growing intellectually and theologically if we are not thinking new and fresh thoughts of God. We are probably not growing as a pastor or leader if we are not developing new teaching and preaching out of the growth that is taking place in all of these areas. Canned sermons and borrowed sermons are usually a sign that growth is diminishing and that one is taking the path of least resistance.

Reasons people stop growing

There are many reasons we stop growing. I believe Jesus highlighted three of the most important of these reasons in Luke 6. He uses three metaphors which highlight growth killers that are common to disciples.

The first is the image of someone who has a plank of wood in their eye, yet is trying to remove the speck from another person's eye. The problem Jesus highlights here is the tendency to judge others—the development of a critical spirit. When one takes the role of critic, rather than lover and learner, that person has stopped growing.

The second inhibitor of growth Jesus points out in Luke 6 is a heart that takes easy offense at what others have done to it. The metaphor He uses is that of a heart with a bramble in it. The evidence of the brambled heart is that it refuses to open itself to others or to new ideas because of the injury that others have done to it. It is imprisoned by the past offenses of others. Brambled hearts are not growing hearts—they are shrinking hearts.

The third condition is captured in the metaphor of the two houses. One was built on the sand, the other on the rock. The problem is in the area of commitment. There is sand in the foundation. Unless we have made our decision to follow Jesus whatever the cost and decided that we will grow and become all that we can be, we will have sand in the foundation. Without a solid rock of commitment, we will take the easy route out. When I asked Evelyn to marry me forty-six years ago, I did so under one condition: that she would never complain at the number of books I bought. I told her that day, “I want to grow all my life and I will need books to do it.” I laid the foundation for a life of growth. The sand was out of the foundation. Commitment to grow is necessary for growth.

There is one other cause for growth to stop that is especially prominent in a charismatic context. It is the temptation to look for an easy way out of the pain that growth requires. It is the opposite of commitment to discipline. It is a reductionism that says, “If I can just have a vital experience with God in which He shows Himself in some powerful way, that is all I need in life.” Some Pentecostals believe that if a person just has the experience of speaking in tongues, it will solve every problem. Others think if they could just go to some meeting where signs and wonders are present, that will be all they need. Signs and wonders are good and speaking in tongues is good, but they are no substitutes for the day-by-day discipline that is required for a person's growth. There is no silver bullet to personal growth. It is a long and painful yet exhilarating pilgrimage.

The rewards of a life of continual growth

The rewards of a growing life are innumerable. A person who is committed to personal growth finds life always getting richer—the better wine is at the end. This person is never “over the hill.” The ones who commit themselves to a life of personal growth will experience what Jesus promised:

the life abundant, even through the most painful circumstances. For the growing person, life becomes richer and richer. I am sixty-six years old. For me, this is the best time of my life. The world's system tells me that I went over the hill twenty-five years ago, but I don't believe it for a minute. Only those who are not committed to growth go "over the hill." The rest are like Caleb, who at the age of 85 took the mountain land of promise.

Not only do we have the reward of an enriched life, but the person who is growing is always preparing for unexpected opportunities that come their way—opportunities to serve. I never thought I would have the privilege of serving as National Director of Vineyard USA, but my continual pursuit of personal growth prepared me for the opportunity to serve this wonderful movement.

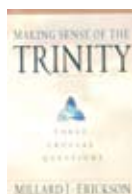
The reward is not just in this life. The reward follows us beyond this life into the presence of our King and Lord. Then as we stand before our Judge, who is also our Savior, we will have the joy of all joys—the joy that comes from hearing Him say, "Well done, you good and faithful servant." That's the ultimate payoff.

Practices and attitudes for growth

What practices and attitudes contribute to a life of personal growth? Docility is the most important attitude. Docility is an attitude of humility, of submission, of being interested. The growing person knows that there is much to learn. He or she listens to those who are authorities. Wisdom is the growing person's passion.

Growing persons practice the classic disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, and worship. They are committed to community and cherish relationships. Growing persons experience God, not just in the big things of life, but also in the day-by-day routine of life. Growing people are both socially aware and

self-aware. Growing persons read the Proverbs and live them. Growing persons are devoted to a lifestyle of growth because they are devoted to a Friend that calls them to a lifetime of growth.



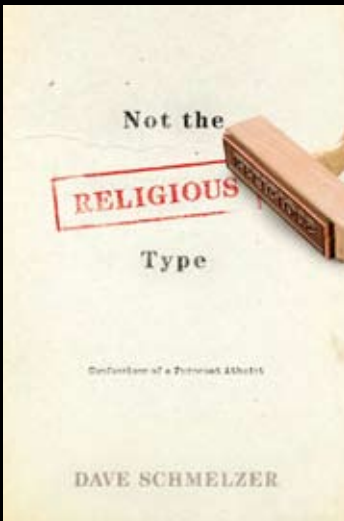
Book Recommendation

Making Sense of the Trinity by
Millard Erickson

BOOK

review

“NOT THE RELIGIOUS TYPE: CONFESSIONS OF A TURNCOAT ATHEIST”



The recent spate of atheist-turned-evangelist books has happy implications: secular people are not apathetic about faith. Dave Schmelzer's new book isn't an attempt to refute Hitchens or Dawkins. Instead, it works from a secular point of view toward faith with an eye to late-modern skepticism about Christianity.

Dave often refers to his past as an atheist. While the fact that this past ended at age 19 may decrease his secular street cred a bit, having been raised outside the church enables him to enter into the mind of his more secularized friends with accuracy. Even the most evangelistically minded pastor can end up in a Christian intellectual ghetto. Reading *Not the Religious Type* is, among other things, a helpful exercise in keeping the secular point of view in mind as we preach and pray.

Whether intended or not, the cheery conversation with a skeptic becomes a simultaneous inner conversation for the Christian leader wrestling with his own doubts and questions. The chapter titles read like the unauthorized spiritual biography of a sometimes-tortured church planter: “It Turns out I’m Not Smart Enough to Understand Churches,” “I’m Not a Jerk! (I May, However, Be a Fool),” “I Want Lots and Lots of Sex,” “Sometimes My Prayers Feel Pretty Lame,” and “Some Inside Dirt on Pastors.” Dave improves on the many Christian authors who have publicly wrestled their demons with his optimistic, faith-filled insistence that there are in fact hopeful, if sometimes partial, answers to

difficult questions (very Stage Four of him! Read the book if that nomenclature is unfamiliar).

Where is the cop-out chapter in which the author explains why we shouldn't really expect all these things to *actually* happen in our lives? It is refreshingly absent. The reader continually expects Schmelzer to pull punches about his grandiose expectations of God, but he never does. This isn't to say the book ignores the difficult side of life, but that it refuses to give up on the overwhelmingly good news of God.

For instance, here is Schmelzer on unanswered prayers:

Your prayers matter beyond what you could guess, whether you're seeing those prayers answered now or not. In my mind, this world of suffering isn't going anywhere. But—as *hesed* suggests—as we faithfully pray (and love), we will see many wonderful surprises.

Schmelzer is unabashed about the supernatural work of the Spirit and, in non-insider language, discusses topics like prophecy, healing, intercession, and kingdom theology. *Not the Religious Type* is helpful both for pastors and lay leaders. It also passes the “not-boring” test with flying colors. *Cutting Edge* highly recommends it.

Dave Schmelzer also blogs at www.notreligious.org.



UPCOMING
Events

Rocky Mountain Region

Church Planting Boot Camp:
Building Your First Leadership Team in a
Church Plant

Date:
January 15-17, 2009

Location:
Salt Lake City, Utah
E-Vin Church
5486 S 1900 W
Taylorsville, UT 84118

Contact:
Danielle Pathak
churchplanting@arvadavineyard.org

Description:
How do you build a leadership team from scratch? We will talk about how to see potential leaders and how to call them to the vision of your church plant. This boot camp would be helpful for people in the process of starting a church plant or people in the first couple years of a plant.

Eastern Region

Church Planting Boot Camp:
Developing a Church Planting Team

Date:
March 20-22, 2009

Location:
Northeast

Contact:
nancy@syracusevineyard.org

Southern Region

Cause Conference:
The Cause Goes Tropical

Date:
February 27-28, 2009

Location:
Miami Vineyard

Contact:
Jeff Anderle, jeff@chattanooga Vineyard.com

Description:
Do you want your life to count? Then do something that's worth risking everything for. We want to call our best and brightest to partner with God in seeing his Kingdom invade Earth through church planting. If you ever thought about planting a church; if you've ever thought about being a part of church planting team; if you are a wild-eyed, crazy idealist who thinks God could use your gifts to start a worship ministry, children's ministry, youth ministry, small groups ministry, prayer team, outreach ministry; if you're bold enough to go where God says to go, do what says God says to do for no money whatsoever then we want you at this conference because we've got a cause to live for, and we want you to be a part of it.