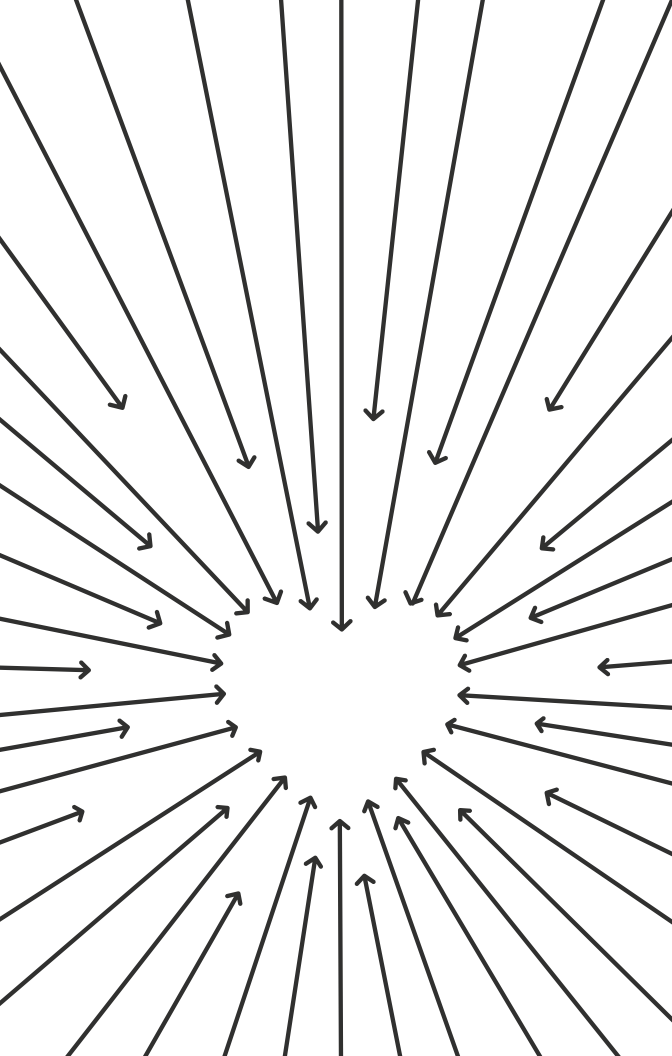




# NOT THERE YET

WHAT I WOULD SAY TO LEADERS UNDER 30

**PERRY NOBLE**



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## **I was pissed!**

I had been in ministry for nine years and would have been considered successful by most people.

My first opportunity for full-time ministry was at a church that had just split. I would be leading a youth group with only 10 students. I had a budget of \$500 and no other staff members to lean into.

In two and a half years, we experienced a record number of salvations, saw the youth group grow to an average of 30 students per week and felt the entire church's temperature change for the better because of our thriving youth ministry.

A few years later, I was offered a job at a church closer to where I attended college. It was a slightly larger church with around 15 students attending the youth ministry each week. The budget far exceeded \$500, and I really liked the senior pastor.

What we saw at my new church from 1993 until 1999 was miraculous. The youth group grew to where we would have 50 students or

so on a Wednesday night (at a church that averaged 180 in attendance). After being asked to take over the college Sunday school, we saw a group of 10 explode to over 100 students every week. Additionally, I started a children's ministry, led worship, and preached for our early morning service. People were always telling me how much they enjoyed hearing me teach God's Word.

I was an up-and-comer, a shining star, a diamond in the rough—and I thought because of my success I was entitled to be treated as a superstar.

So, why was I pissed?

Because after all the success I had seen, all the hard work I had put in, and all the potential I felt I had to take on greater responsibility, my pastor asked me to change the church sign.

I really despise church signs and their catchy phrases:

- Come on in. Our church is prayer conditioned.
- CH\_\_CH What's missing? U R
- Stop, drop, and roll doesn't work in hell.

***Think back to a time where you were asked to do something that you felt was below your pay grade by a senior leader. How did you respond?***

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I am sure there are a few exceptions, but I have a hard time believing countless individuals have said, “Oh my gosh, that sign said stop, drop, and roll doesn’t work in hell! I need to stop the car, get on my knees and ask Jesus into my heart.”

And Bill, my pastor, had just asked me to change the church sign. (You know, take the letters down and put up a really bad saying that he had came up with himself.)

I’m convinced Bill Rigsby earned extra crowns in heaven simply because he allowed me to serve on staff with him without firing me, even though I gave him numerous reasons that would have justified it.

When Bill first asked me to change the sign, I resisted.

He did not budge.

I located a copy of the church bylaws, found a section where the publicity committee was

*If you're under the age of 30, what are two to three ways you can develop in ministry? If you're over 30, what are two to three ways you wish you could've developed before the age of 30?*

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supposed to change the sign every week, highlighted it in yellow, put it on Bill's desk, and went home.

The next day, Bill had placed a copy of my job description on my desk with the section "other duties as assigned by the senior pastor" highlighted on it. To drive his point home, he placed a sticky note on it telling me to make sure the sign was changed before lunch.

So there I was, "Mr. Potential," the guy who was seen as "the man" in our small church, stooping down to a menial task I hated when I CLEARLY should have been reading, studying, praying, and maybe even attempting to walk on water.

I thought about quitting!

No, I'm not kidding! I was seething with anger. This was stupid. It was a church sign. Anyone could have done it, but apparently my job description had changed to "pastoral slave," and

there was nothing I could do about it.

Maybe you haven't experienced these exact circumstances, but you are feeling the way I felt.

You are the one in your church or organization that seems to set things on fire with your passion and creativity.

The things you are leading are experiencing success at a level never seen under previous leadership.

You are being recognized as someone who will be a major player one day.

And yet, in spite of your promising upside, charismatic personality, and bold vision, you are still being asked to make copies, show up early to open the building, and answer the phone while the receptionist is out for lunch.

You're frustrated!

You're confused!

You're under-challenged!

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***What is the dream God has given you for ministry?***

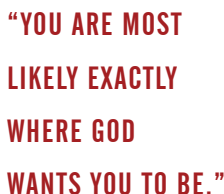


And, you are most likely exactly where God wants you to be!

Read that last sentence again because that is not the typical thinking for leaders under 30.

If you are under 30, you most likely feel held back, undiscovered, or even pushed down by leaders ahead of you.

You really are capable of more than getting coffee or running down the street to pick up everyone's lunch order. After all, don't they know who you are? Don't they see your talent and what you have the potential to accomplish one day?



**“YOU ARE MOST  
LIKELY EXACTLY  
WHERE GOD  
WANTS YOU TO BE.”**

Trust me when I tell you that if you are under 30 and feeling frustrated, confused, or under-challenged, you are most likely exactly where God wants you to be.

One of the greatest dangers for leaders under 30

is to focus on their desire to be discovered rather than developed.

In the desire for discovery, young leaders feel pressure to prove themselves. They are tempted to take shortcuts, and they rebel against any type of authority in order to demonstrate that no one is going to boss them around.

However, as I look back on my own life and what I experienced before I was 30, I would not trade it for the world. The world did not know who I was. While I thought I needed to be promoted, God knew I needed to be protected and He loved me so much that He hid me and developed me where no one else could see.

One day, while doing some personal study, I realized something. Three of the GREATEST leaders in the Bible—Joseph, David, and Jesus—stepped into their purpose and began their ministry at 30.

There really is something spiritual about crossing the line of 30.

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***List one aspect of your character that you know you need to improve upon in your 20s?***

So, if you are a leader under 30 who is frustrated and confused, I hope the rest of this book will encourage you and bring perspective to your situation. I also hope God will use this time in your life to develop you into a greater leader than you ever imagined.

I talk a lot about David in my book, ***The Most Excellent Way To Lead***, but when I think about who young leaders can most relate to, I think about Joseph.

We are first introduced to Joseph in Genesis 37. He is most likely no older than 16 or 17, and he tells his brothers about a dream where they were all bowing down to him.

Joseph was a dreamer! He had huge vision! He was going to somehow rise from the bottom of the family to the most honored position—and he did not mind sharing it with the people he would one day rule over.

What was their reaction?

Anger!

Who was this young punk saying they were all

going to bow down to him?

Let me pause and acknowledge that Joseph did have a dream where the brothers were bowing down to him, and that dream was given to him by God. However, because of Joseph's desire to be discovered, he thought it best to let his brothers know right away rather than holding on to the dream God had placed inside of him to see what the Lord wanted to do next.

Joseph took it a step further when he let his brothers know he had a second dream where they bowed down to him again. Only this time, his mother and father joined them.

Once again, Joseph did have the dream. And, once again, the dream was from God. However, the purpose of the dream was to advance God's Kingdom, not Joseph's kingdom. God's plans for our lives are always bigger than just our lives. They are not limited to doing good for us, but are intended to do good for others.

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***What “church signs” (i.e. ‘small things’) have been entrusted to you to steward well?***

Joseph could not see that the dream wasn't about him. He was young, reckless, and ready to see what was next in this amazing plan God had communicated for HIS life.

As a young leader, I fell into this temptation as well. Often, I was reckless with my words as I spoke against the people over me. They were obviously clueless and needed to be replaced with someone as awesome as me. After all, I had a vision in my heart from God that I was going to be a part of something amazing one day.

One of the verses I became very familiar with as a young leader is Daniel 4:37: "...and those who walk in pride He is able to humble."

It seemed the more I jockeyed for position, the more I experienced setbacks, demotions, and menial tasks instead of opportunities to shine.

Joseph was trying to prove himself by boasting. He was trying to establish himself by repeating what was in his heart. However, the greatest leaders—the leaders who make a difference—are not people who try to position or promote themselves, but those who take a posture of

humility and accept whatever task Jesus puts in front of them.

If we are not faithful with the small things, why would Jesus trust us with more?

Joseph experienced what we will refer to as a “setback” in Genesis 39. His brothers turned on him, beat him up, threw him in a cistern, and

**“WHAT JOSEPH MOST  
LIKELY VIEWED  
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AS PREPARATION.”**

made a plan to kill him. They were not impressed with this young leader, his vision, or his plans to rule over them.

However, as the Lord would have it, they chose not to kill Joseph but to sell him into slavery, thus rid-

ding themselves of their problem.

At this point, can you imagine what Joseph was thinking? He knew God had placed the dream in his heart. He knew he was called to do great things. He knew he was going to be a great leader one day, and now he was forced into

slavery. He was quite possibly going to have to “change church signs” in Egypt when he knew he had the potential to do much more.

It’s important to understand that Joseph eventually did become a tremendous leader. He was second in command of the most powerful country in the world and set a system in place that saved everyone from starvation (Genesis 41:39–44, Genesis 41:47–57).

However, before Joseph was discovered as a leader, he had to be developed into one. And that process began when he was sold into slavery to a guy named Potiphar.

For years, I would allow this section of Joseph’s story to escape me, but Genesis 39:1 says, “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.”

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***Write out three to four ways God is using your current role to develop you to fulfill your future calling.***

Pause!

He was sold to who?

Potiphar!

Potiphar's job was what?

He was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Question: If one day you were going to be Pharaoh's second in command, in charge of military operations and such, where would be the best place in the world for you to be developed?

How about as a slave to Potiphar?

What Joseph most likely viewed as punishment, God was using as preparation.

This was not the leadership position Joseph dreamed of. This was not the recognition Joseph longed for. Yet, it was where the Lord brought him, and the Scriptures tell us in Genesis 39:2–6:

“The Lord was with Joseph so that he pros-



pered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate."

Instead of complaining, Joseph committed to training.

Instead of becoming bitter, Joseph allowed his situation to make him better.

Because the Lord was with Joseph and because Joseph was willing to do whatever it took to be great at what was in his hands, Joseph eventually rose to the top of the ladder.

Maybe this is the point where Joseph thought,

“I have arrived! I am going to be discovered, set free, and finally accomplish my dream.”

Joseph was discovered, but it wasn't by Fortune 500. It was by Potiphar's wife!! The Bible tells us in Genesis 39:6–10:

“Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’

But he refused. ‘With me in charge,’ he told her, ‘my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?’ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.”

There have been numerous speculations by Bible scholars as to whether Potiphar's wife was attractive. In this time, high-ranking government officials prided themselves on their arm candy. Therefore, I believe she was an attractive woman.

However, Joseph refused to take advantage of the situation presenting itself to him.

This speaks to his character development.

If God is going to work through someone to make a lasting impact on the world, He is going to work through a person of character.

Character is not something you can develop on the spot. It is something the Lord does in you, over time, while you are in the shadows.

All too often, young leaders fail the character test. They allow entitlement and frustration over not being discovered to propel them to compromising situations that sabotage their future success.

If Joseph had slept with Mrs. Potiphar, he would have sacrificed what he wanted most for what he could have in the moment—never a great leadership exchange.

One of the biggest leadership myths I bought into when I was under 30 was if I did what was right that I would always be recognized and rewarded.

Not so!

Joseph resisted the temptation to have sex with Potiphar's wife. So she set him up, lied about him, and claimed he tried to rape her. When Potiphar found out, he was enraged and Genesis 39:20 tells us, "Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined."

I'm not sure about you, but at this point, I would be screaming, "This sucks!" Joseph had worked his butt off, done what was right, refused to compromise his character, and this is how he was rewarded.

Let's remember, Joseph was eventually going to become a tremendous leader. He would be second in charge over all of Egypt and would develop a system that saves the world from starvation.

In order for this to happen, Joseph would need to know politics. How did the Egyptian political system work? How were decisions made? What was Pharaoh's personality like?

Question: If you were going to be Pharaoh's sec-

ond in command, where would be the best place to be developed in the shadows?

How about the king's prison?

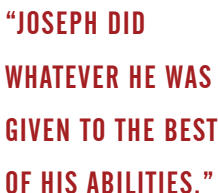
Who would be put in the king's prison?

Political prisoners!

What would they most likely talk about during the day?

Politics!

Joseph was the recipient of the best training ground in the world. But at the time, I am positive he did not see it that way.



**“JOSEPH DID  
WHATEVER HE WAS  
GIVEN TO THE BEST  
OF HIS ABILITIES.”**

Joseph saw his situation as hopeless; God saw Joseph's situation as preparation for the leadership position he would one day experience.

Instead of screaming, “You’ve GOT to be

kidding me!", Joseph did whatever he was given to the best of his abilities. And eventually, the warden put Joseph over all of the prisoners.

At this point, Joseph had most likely given up on the dream God gave him as a teen. But God had not. In the prison, God was teaching Joseph the leadership skills he would need to succeed.

The Lord had plans for Joseph that were beyond his imagination. And over time, Joseph proved he would be faithful with whatever the Lord put in his hands. Whether it was Potiphar's house or the prison, Joseph gave it his best shot.

Let's go back to the church sign for a second.

It was summer, extremely humid, and the phrase Bill gave me to put on BOTH SIDES of the sign seemed longer than a Charles Dickens novel. I was sweating profusely, questioning my call into ministry, and winning an imaginary argument with Bill about how I should not have to change the sign.

Then, it hit me. If I cannot be trusted to change a church sign, how in the world could I ever be

trusted to lead a church one day?

If I could not submit to the authority over me, then how would I, with integrity, have authority over people and expect them to trust me?

This task was about WAY more than changing a sign. It was about changing me —helping me see that development is greater than discovery and having the humility to do the small things is the building block God uses to develop great leaders.

Our society is an instantaneous society. We want to see things happen immediately. If it takes more than 3 seconds for a website to pop up on our phones, we are ready to throw the phone against the wall. If we have to wait more than 5 minutes in a drive thru, we begin cursing the restaurant and swearing we will never come back. Unfortunately, leadership among younger leaders has trends in this direction as well.

And with the explosion of social media, the potential for a leader to be discovered at a younger age has never been more real—and chilling.

One day while reading through the Scriptures, something hit me I had never seen: Every reference to spiritual growth in the Bible is agricultural. The Bible uses the metaphor of sowing a seed, waiting, then reaping over and over.

People who read the Bible when it was written understood this concept. Once you put a seed in the ground, it was going to take time for fruit to be produced. No one ever planted and then expected a crop the next day. Sowing and reaping take time.

It's the same with leadership.

In a culture where we can have just about everything immediately, we must understand that the ability to become a great leader is not something we can download in a nanosecond from heaven's high-speed Internet. Leadership ability is sown into us by the Holy Spirit and developed over time.

Now let's go back to Joseph.

He had been in some sort of slave position for around 13 years. He had worked behind the



scenes and learned lessons he never would have learned had he not been willing to work hard. He developed relationships with people and helped them when they had problems.

And eventually, Joseph's big break came. Genesis 40:1–6 sets up this section of the story:

“Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, ‘Why do you look so

sad today?”

Pause and consider something with me. When we first met Joseph, he could not stop talking about himself (something I also loved to do as a young leader). However, in this text we see that Joseph went from being the guy talking about how awesome he is and what plans he is going to accomplish to the one who cares about people and takes a genuine interest in what they are going through.

**“JOSEPH LEARNED  
TO VALUE PEOPLE  
OVER HIS POSITION.”**

The older I get, the more I understand that people haven't been placed on the planet to serve my dreams. I've been placed on the planet to serve them.

Joseph learned to value people over his position! The secret to getting people to buy into what you are saying is to get them to buy into you as a person. It took me years to learn that people would follow me short term if I said the right phrases, but people will walk with me long term if they knew I cared about them.

As a leader under 30, I wish I had spent less time talking about my dreams and asked people about theirs.

Joseph told the cupbearer it was going to go well for him. The baker, excited by this news asked, “What about me?” Joseph told him he was going to die. (Talk about the willingness to have a hard conversation!)

Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he got back into Pharaoh’s service, and the cupbearer agreed. However, Genesis 39:23 is a sobering reminder that people don’t always do what they say they will do: “The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.”

Leaders under 30 often wrestle with feeling forgotten. I remember the sting of what it was like for people not to take me seriously or to smile at me like I was some freaking kid.

As I look back, I can see I was not forgotten. I was being forged into a leader.

“How long will I have to put up with this?” you might ask. Genesis 41:1 gives us some insight

when the Bible says, “When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile...”

The part I want to focus on is where the Bible says, “When two full years had passed...”

Two full years of smelling dungeon.

Two full years of taking care of prisoners.

Two full years of listening to political insight from criminals.

But then, all of the sudden, Pharaoh has a couple of disturbing dreams. He calls in the experts to interpret for him and everyone is freaked out.

No one has the solution!

No one has the answer!

And BAM, the cupbearer remembers this dude he met in prison who helped him with a similar situation.

The cupbearer told Pharaoh about Joseph. Pharaoh called for Joseph, and soon Joseph was

standing in front of the most powerful man in the world.

Some people would look at a situation like this and call it coincidence, but I call it providence.

Some would say Joseph was in the right place at the right time. Joseph had cultivated humility, was willing to work hard behind the scenes, and now God was placing him in a position to make a difference in ways he could have never imagined.

Joseph interpreted the dream then offered a solution—a systematic plan that would ensure Egypt's prosperity and save everyone from starving.

As far as I can tell from Scripture, no one really asked for Joseph's advice. However, after 13 years of being in a place of obscurity, Joseph learned a lesson every leader needs to take to heart: "It's not about me!"

When Joseph first shared his dream with his family, it was all about him and how he was going to accomplish great things.

However, over time God developed humility in Joseph's heart as well as an incredible work ethic. So when Joseph saw an opportunity to serve the nation holding him prisoner, he took it. Genesis 41:39–43 says:

“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.’ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, ‘Make way!’ Thus, he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Talk about going from the mailroom to the corner office.

After Joseph was developed out of sight, he was discovered at the right time. But don't miss Genesis 39:46, “Joseph was thirty years old when he

entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Thirty!

There’s something about 30!

Oh, and by the way, Joseph’s brothers did eventually come and bow before him, just like he had seen in the dream. However, because of how the Lord humbled Joseph and grew his character and ability, he understood that his brothers bowing to him was not about his position but a result of the preparation he had undergone out of the sight of everyone else.

Joseph was able to forgive his brothers, save the world from starvation, and prevent the economy from crashing.

He was planted in the prison, but he was eventually promoted to the palace.

And Joseph was not promoted as a result of trying to prove himself, but because of his willingness to humble himself.

Nothing can be more frustrating than sitting in a meeting with someone who is trying to

prove himself.

You know, the person who always has to have the best idea.

The person who automatically begins to tear down any idea that is not his.

The person who always has to say something, no matter what the conversation is about.

I've been that person in the room.

Why was I like that?

I wanted to be seen as valuable, smart, needed, a go-getter. However, what I wound up doing was driving people away. As a result, I am sure

I missed opportunities because I was overly obsessed with me.

An unbelievable amount of peace comes into a leader's heart when his main goal in life is to do the best he can with what he has been given rather than having to be the person who is recognized at every gathering.



How Joseph loved people was demonstrated in a powerful way when his brothers came before him and did not know who he was. Joseph had experienced 13 years of slavery and hard labor because of their treatment, and now he had the power to imprison them, torture them, or even have them killed.

Despite all of that, when faced with this situation, Joseph chose to forgive.



**“HE CHOSE  
TO LOVE PEOPLE**

This is what, in my mind, established Joseph as an excellent leader. He chose to love people rather than seek revenge.

**RATHER THAN  
SEEK REVENGE.”**

There is no record of Joseph tracking down Potiphar and his wife and having them thrown in prison.

There is no record of Joseph letting the cupbearer have it because of his negligence in forgetting to tell Pharaoh about Joseph.

When given the option, Joseph chose to value people over punishment. His time behind the scenes taught him to see people as special rather than using them as means to climb the ladder.

Leaders under 30 really do wrestle with this. They have to fight to slow down long enough to value people, to take opportunities to serve, and to realize people are not only here to serve them and their purposes.

In a recent question and answer session, someone asked, “If I could go back in time 20 years and talk to the 23-year-old version of me, what would I say?”

Two things:

1. Listen more, talk less!!!
2. Establish relationships with people and dedicate yourself to serving them.

That’s what I think Joseph learned.

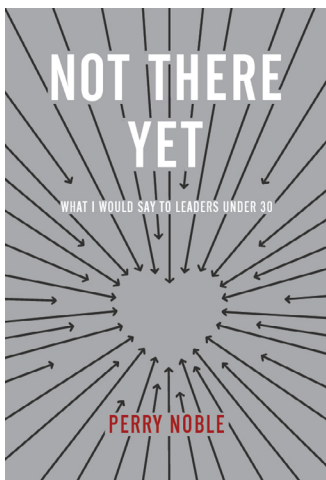
That’s something I’ve learned.

And I believe if you are a leader under 30, the

best thing you can do is focus on what the Lord has placed in your hands today. Do the very best with what you've got, and seek wisdom as much as you can. Because you would not believe the amazing future the Lord has for you!

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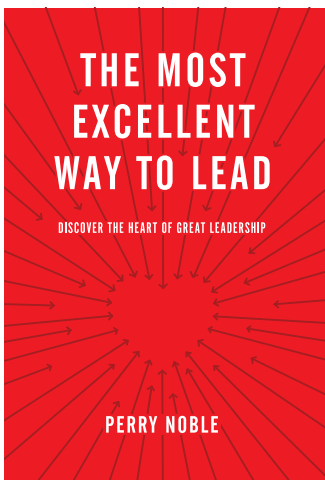
*If you're a leader under 30, who is a leader over 30 you can gain wisdom and guidance from? If you're a leader over 30, who is a leader under 30 you can guide and encourage?*



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