



Leaders

BOOK SUMMARIES

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Replenish

Leading From A Healthy Soul

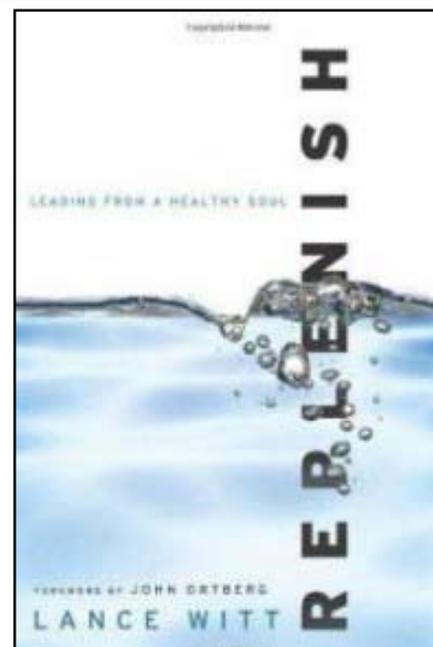
THE SUMMARY

The Idolatry of Leadership

"What's missing in the church today?" This question was posed to a well-known mega-church pastor. His one-word answer was "vision," and I couldn't disagree more with his assessment. We are obsessed with leadership and intoxicated by vision. There has been a tidal wave of conferences, books, and other resources devoted to helping us become better leaders. And for good reason.

Many of us were ill-equipped to provide organizational leadership. As churches grew and the culture changed, pastors had to learn the world of creating budgets, managing staff, casting vision, and managing change. So the inundation of resources met a definite need, and we have all benefitted. Leadership is wonderful...until it becomes an idol.

We need to expand the leadership conversation to include questions that aren't asked often enough. What does spiritual leadership look like? What does healthy leadership look like? How is leadership different in the church vs. in the marketplace? I say this because in trying to fill the gap with leadership resources, we have inadvertently marginalized the soul side of leadership. The result is a crisis—one of spiritual health among



About the Author

Founder of Replenish Ministries, Lance Witt is often called a "pastor's pastor." He has served for over 30 years as a pastor, 20 as a senior pastor. He also served as an executive and teaching pastor at Saddleback Church.

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pastors.

Here are just a few of the troubling statistics:

- 80% of pastors feel discouraged in their roles
- 70% of pastors don't have a close friend or confidant
- 30% have had either an affair or a 1x sexual encounter with a parishioner
- 71% say they are burned out and battle depression at least weekly.

We have neglected the fact that a pastor's greatest leadership tool is a healthy soul. Our emphasis on skills and strategies has resulted in deemphasizing the interior life, resulting in increasing numbers of men and women leading our churches who are emotionally empty and spiritually dry.

We may be better leaders than we used to be, but the evidence suggests we are not better pastors or husbands or Christ-followers. It is no longer safe to assume that those of us who lead in the kingdom are on track spiritually. That is the point of this book. When it comes to the church, you can't separate leadership from the leader. But we've become adept at projecting an image that doesn't accurately reflect what's going on inside of us.

When I think of the Great Commission, I believe this God-sized task will only be completed by Spirit-filled, spiritually healthy churches. And these churches will not be spiritually healthy unless their leaders are spiritually healthy. It's time we went back to basics and swing the pendulum toward the soul and toward spiritual health.

Hole in My Soul

We all have a front-stage life and a back-stage life. Front stage is the public world of ministry. It's where we cast vision, inspire, and lead with skill. Front stage is all about *doing*. But we also have a back-stage life, and the two are connected. If we neglect the back stage, eventually the front stage will fall apart. The back stage is the private world of the leader. It's

private, dark, and usually messy. What happens there empowers what takes place on the front stage. Back stage is all about *being*.

For most of my ministry I neglected my back-stage life, the care of my soul. After all, front stage is where the action is. But I am learning that the key to the Christian life is found back stage, and the only way to be healthy is to pay attention to it. Our soul is far and away the most valuable possession we have. Just as you need to tend your body to be physically healthy, you must tend your soul if you want to be spiritually healthy.

I suggest a three-part strategy to pursue health:

1. *Realize*. This is about taking the time to reflect and be honest about the issues that are a threat to your soul.
 2. *Repair*. Once you've identified the holes, you can start to take steps to repair them.
 3. *Refill*. Once you've done the first two, you can begin to focus on getting refilled. This is about learning to fill your soul and lead from a healthy place. You'll discover some habits that can sustain a lifetime of spiritual health.
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Your Ministry is not Your Life

I was crystal clear about this when I went into ministry as a young man. But there have been seasons through the years when I lost that clarity. My ministry became my identity and my first love. It consumed all my spiritual passion. The unintended byproduct during those seasons was a slow disconnect from Jesus.

As ministry leaders we have been called to do a hard thing. We are kingdom bringers to a dark world, in a real battle. Add to this that we are broken and frail and flawed. We desperately need the life of Jesus flowing through us in order to carry out our kingdom calling.

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De-Toxing Your Soul

Image management

There's nothing wrong with those two words but when you put them together and give them to a ministry leader, it is a deadly cocktail. Image management is what we begin to do when our inner world becomes separated from our outer world.

The danger, really, isn't in projecting a false image; there's a Pharisee inside all of us, and I suspect we'll struggle with this as long as we live. The greatest danger is in getting comfortable with it, learning how to "succeed" with a disconnected soul. Over time we can become very adept at playing the image-management game. The truth is you don't have to have a healthy soul to be seen as a success in ministry. As the years have gone by, I have found it easy to function out of my experience and gifting and skill rather than dependence on God.

Seduction of Ambition

Ambition is a double-edged sword. When it is God-directed and Spirit-managed, it can bear tremendous fruit. When it is restrained by humility, ambition can be a powerful motivator. But when it is hijacked by self and ego, it can leave a wake of destruction in its path.

Here's where it gets sticky. Is this drive and desire and motivation about me or about God and his purposes? If we're honest, we would have to admit that our hearts are entangled with God-directed motives and self-directed motives. Sorting them out is complex.

God wired into every one of us a creative tension. On the one hand, we have what the ancients referred to as a "fire in the belly." This is our inner source of vision, our longing to make a difference, our will to achieve. At the same time, God also has hardwired

into us the need for quiet, solitude, rest, and reflection (a healthy soul). You need both a fire in the belly and a spiritual recliner to be healthy. In fact, you *must* have both.

Think of it like this: The fire (ambition) is like raw electricity. It's alive, powerful, exciting, and full of potential, but it can also be dangerous. Think of a healthy soul as a transformer. A transformer serves to regulate, channel, direct, and control electricity. A transformer takes what's potentially harmful and deadly and turns it into something useful.

Recently all the focus has been on the electricity. I have a growing conviction that it's dangerous to equip young leaders with vision, leadership, strategy and church growth principles without equipping them to have healthy souls. We need to be just as serious about building transformers as we are about generating raw electricity.

Ambition Ambush

When you've been in ministry leadership awhile, you learn how to cloak ambition in kingdom language. You can wrap ambition in God talk and sanctify it!

This is one reason it's so important to build solitude into your life. At least for me, during times of listening and quiet God turns the spotlight of the Holy Spirit onto my ambition. But if I'm moving at an insane pace and there is no room in my life for quiet, I will miss God's voice. And I will continue on a path of self-deception.

We need to start asking ourselves some hard and penetrating questions. We must dig beneath the surface and extract the roots that keep producing dysfunction. *Why am I so driven? Why do I keep pushing so hard? Am I obsessed with success? Do I have God's measuring stick for success?*

At a minimum we need to get a right view of humility. It's not being down on yourself; it is about who gets

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the glory. It's our job to humble ourselves and leave it to God when and how he honors us.

Approval Addiction

In my first pastorate, I made an important discovery. I was working really hard, out of a sincere devotion to Christ. I was also working hard to earn the approval of the people in the church. As I ponder it now, it was more than approval I wanted—it was applause. I wanted to be successful and for people to know it and acknowledge it. Applause was the fuel necessary for me to feel significant.

Whether you use the word approval or applause, here's the bottom line: I was living for people and finding my worth, value, significance, and identity in what others thought of me. This kind of addiction messes with your motives. You run decisions through the filter of "What will people think?" rather than "What's the right thing to do?"

It also messes with your time and emotional energy. I spent a lot of emotional energy either seeking after people's affirmation or worrying about their criticism. We need to learn to look for God's approval, not people's. At the end of the day He will evaluate my life not on the world's definition of success but on His definition of faithfulness.

Isolation Trap

For some reason expanded leadership influence often goes hand in hand with increased relational isolation. But the reality is that I need people in my life who can help me stay on track in my private world. According to Jesus, it is my private life that gives spiritual power and validation to my public ministry, so being isolated is doubly dangerous.

Here's the rub. In an attempt to create structures that allow greater leadership freedom (a good thing) many have opted for structures that include little

accountability (a bad thing). It's a recipe for dysfunction when a leader is organizationally and relationally isolated. I need "many advisors" because I have blind spots and insecurities. I need it for the church, because I am only a part of the body, not the whole thing, and I need it personally. I need people who'll love me enough to speak the truth to me when I need to hear it—even if I won't like it. Without that I'm vulnerable.

Need For Speed

Many of us live with a stuck accelerator. The frantic pace of life resides in the church as much as in the community. And we have no trouble rationalizing our velocity. After all, time is short, and we're going fast for Jesus. We have been scammed into believing that an insane pace is simply the price tag of effective leadership.

But worse than my hurried pace is my hurried spirit. Hurry is more about what's going on inside you than what is going on around you. It's not easy to slow down our lives. Despite all our lamenting about how busy we are, we like the exhilaration; it makes us feel important. We like pushing the envelope, and we like the adrenaline rush of a full life. Even in moments we think we'd like to get off the treadmill, we're not quite sure what we would give up. How do you slow down in a world that just keeps speeding up?

I've come to this conviction: following Jesus cannot be done at a sprint. You can't live life at warp speed without warping your soul. Here's my question: What would it look like for you to "unstick" your life's accelerator?

Fatigued, Frazzled, and Fried

Everywhere I go I meet people who want a simpler, slower life. People are exhausted and frazzled. For some reason, in our culture we have swallowed hook, line, and sinker the lie that busyness equals impor-

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tance. I have not been exempt. For years I intuitively knew my busyness was violating my soul. Constant activity could prop up the external image I wanted to project, but it couldn't prop up my soul.

At the peak of my own struggle with busyness, all I did was work. Even worse, all I wanted to do was work. Any desire for hobbies, vacation, or recreation had gone dormant. Busyness was driving my life.

If we are going to turn the tide, it's going to take some leaders who get mad enough to decide they aren't going to take it anymore. No one is holding a gun to our heads, forcing us to over-commit and over-schedule. As leaders we must have the guts to make some changes in our personal lives and church programs.

It's Not All About the Weekend

As a pastor for the last 30 years, I know that we pastors tend to live and die by weekend services, especially depending on the attendance. However, too much focus on weekend attendance has one of two results, and neither is good. The pastor ends up feeling either proud or discouraged.

In ministry we need to recapture the word *faithful*. It is the nature of our world to be enamored with what's big. But in the church we should seek to be enamored with what's godly. By God's call, some people are given hard assignments where the soil is hard; others get to reap where they haven't sown. Size isn't the issue; faithfulness is.

Start Here....Start Now

Pit Stops Required

More than ever, it is imperative for leaders to take time away for thinking and reflection about where we are and where we're headed. The knee-jerk reaction for most of us is to say, "That sounds good, but I just

don't have the time." If you're thinking this, I would respond that you can't afford *not* to take the time. In order to maintain my sanity and some semblance of spiritual health, I have to *make* time for personal retreat.

Leaders who stay spiritually healthy long term are those who learn the sacred rhythm of advance and retreat. There *are* times when we're focused on the mission and taking the next hill for Christ's kingdom. But you can't say on the front lines forever. You have to rest and regroup. In fact, the more fierce and intense the battle, the more often you have to retreat.

Times of retreat have had two powerful benefits for me. First, they replenish my soul. When I started taking retreats, being quiet wasn't enjoyable; I stayed in high gear and couldn't slow down. Eventually I learned how to, and am learning how to "be" with my heavenly Father, and my soul is replenished in the process. Second, I recalibrate my perspective. I begin to focus on what God sees as really important.

So how about it? Schedule a 24-hour personal retreat. It won't kill you, the world will manage without you, and you will be healthier for it.

What Kind of Old Person Do I Want To Be?

Once I hit 50 that question took on new meaning for me. I became more self-reflective and introspective than ever before. And as I look around I realize that fairly few "finish well." Some drift into self-centeredness; others become impatient and cynical toward the next generation. Some become grumpy and critical. Others are just living in the past.

At this point in life we are capable of leading out of our experience rather than a healthy soul. I'm not saying passion for ministry goes away. It just feels different than when you started. As a 25-year veteran, you face a whole new set of challenges. The triple-A of adrenaline, ambition, and achievement aren't

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enough to sustain you anymore. Our sermons are better, our leadership is better, our planning is better, but our intimacy with Jesus? Not so much.

For some of us in ministry, the challenge is different. It's not success that threatens our soul but the perceived lack of success that now becomes the threat to us as we age. Ministry hasn't turned out like we thought it would. We've done the best we could, but it hasn't added up.

If ministry hasn't turned out as expected, I want to ask you a question. What kind of old man or woman do you want to be? I'm not asking what kind of ministry you want to have. I'm asking about you, as a person, as a Christ follower. You can't change the past, but you can plot a different trajectory for your future.

The Call No One Wants To Get

We all love to be successful, and to be recognized for it. But what if you are called to obscurity? That probably was never part of your plan. One of the spiritual health questions every ministry leader must answer is, "Am I willing to serve in obscurity?"

When the spotlight is gone (or if it is never turned on), what you have left is relationship. That's why paying attention to your soul is so important. Someday the trappings of ministry will fade away, and all you'll have will be Jesus. Will that be enough?

If you're in a time of obscurity now, God has not forgotten you. Even though you might be hidden from the world, you are not hidden from Him. Allow this anonymous season to deepen rather than discourage you. Don't chase after the spotlight; chase after the relationship.

Simplicity Is Not Simple

The world is not going to slow down. Life and ministry

are more complex and challenging than ever. Simplicity was something I longed for, but felt elusive, to say the least.

When I was exhausted and stressed, I'd often deceive myself with, "It'll get better. This is only for a season." But it didn't get better, and when one season of ministry was finished, it was simply replaced with a new season of demands and pressures.

At least for me, the first step toward simplicity was taking full responsibility. I had to own my stuff and admit that when it comes to simplicity I am my own worst enemy. I wasn't the victim, I was the perpetrator. I also had to realize I will never drift toward simplicity. The drift is always toward complexity and clutter.

So how do you move toward simplicity? You get crystal clear about your values and priorities. When these are clear, decisions get simple. Not easy, but simple. Simplicity is not necessarily about doing less; it's about using your priorities to filter opportunities and options.

I've devised a formula that helps me in pursuit of simplicity: Clarity + Courage + Calendar = Simplicity. First I need to get clear about what's really important in my life. After that, I must have the courage to execute based on that clarity. Finally, the courage to execute gets very practical when I calendar my priorities.

Feel The Rhythm

Many Christian leaders today are living AWOL (A Worn-Out Life). I see it often. Over time, our spiritual and emotional reserves get depleted, we get worn down, and eventually lose our way.

The key to unlocking a sane pace of life is found in that word "rhythm." Jesus regularly took time to withdraw and be alone and be with his Father. I am learning the rhythms of Sabbath, personal retreat,

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and quiet reflection. I haven't mastered it, but my life is less frantic and fatigued. The benefits of a life of rhythm spill over into every area of life.

70% of Pastors Don't Have One

Most of us in ministry don't do the friendship thing very well. One survey found that 70% don't have a close friend or confidante. But if I'm going to be spiritually healthy, I'm going to need an intimate friend or two who fully know me, friends who aren't impressed with me and who aren't afraid to tell me the truth. That kind of friendship doesn't happen by accident. You have to be intentional about it, and committed to it. The end result is a much richer life.

Does Your Soul Have A Backbone?

Over the last few years my single most consistent prayer has been for spiritual courage. As I look at the last 30+ years of ministry, one of my regrets has to do with this issue of courage. My fear of people leaving our church, my fear of people not liking me, my fear of criticism, and my fear of the "old guard" often kept me from making courageous leadership decisions. I could always justify my position in the name of "not going too fast" or "keeping unity" or "bringing people along" but the truth is sometimes it was just a lack of courage.

Looking back I realize there's a correlation between my communion *with* God and my courage *for* God. The deeper my intimacy, the greater my tenacity to stand courageously. The more Christ *is* my life, the less I need to find life in other's opinions. And that means I am more free to ask "What's the right thing to do?" instead of "What is the popular or politically expedient thing to do?"

Sustaining a Lifetime of Health

The Art of Doing Nothing

For the first 30 years of my Christian life, the concept of Sabbath wasn't even a blip on my spiritual radar. It was both theologically and practically irrelevant for me. I bought into the "burn out for Jesus" mentality, which is very American—and thoroughly unbiblical.

In recent years I've begun to understand the importance of stopping and have begun to embrace a theology of rest. The seventh day, the day of rest, was so important that God declared it holy. The first thing the Bible ever declared holy was not an object or a place, but a time—a 24-hour period called Sabbath.

When I first started trying to practice Sabbath, I hated it. It was neither enjoyable nor spiritual; it felt like de-tox. I kept wanting to check email or work on a project or whittle down my to-do list. I was so driven that slowing down was actually uncomfortable. Even when my body slowed down, internally I was still amped.

Over time I am learning that Sabbath is not a have-to, it's a get-to. This incredible gift from God allows us to reflect, restore, and replenish, and reconnect with the reality that God is in control, and we are not indispensable. I don't know what it will look like for you, but Sabbath is helping me become a better Christ-follower and a better person.

Say Yes By Saying No

Tony Blair, former British Prime Minister, once said, "The art of leadership is not saying yes, but saying no." His insight is not only true of those who lead organizations; it's also true of those who lead themselves well. Some people undercut themselves because they can never say "no" to anything. We don't want to disappoint anyone, so we don't refuse them. It's just another symptom of being an approval junkie.

William Ury said, "Like all good No's, ours were in service to a higher Yes." If I'm going to learn to say

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no to people, I must discover the “higher yes.”

Maybe part of the reason we have such a hard time with no is that we aren’t still long enough to discover the yes. This would be a great exercise for a personal retreat. Ask yourself, “What is the higher Yes in my life that will become the filter through which I make decisions?”

Noise-Canceling Headphones For The Soul

If I’m going to be spiritually healthy, I must find ways to cancel the noise around me and experience times of solitude. *Solitude*. Most everyone I know longs for more solitude. Intuitively we know it’s important to have extended time alone. But experientially it feels elusive, and this reality sets up a titanic clash of two worlds.

On one hand is the world of the inner man, needing soul connection with God. Words that characterize this world, when healthy, are words like *time, reflection, quiet, depth, and slow*. On the other hand is the outer, or external, visible world. Words that characterize this world are words like *fast, instant, fragmented, noisy, shallow, and exhausted*.

Too much noise and too much activity can be toxic to the soul. Just like your body needs time to recover from an infection, your soul needs time to recover from the push and pull of modern ministry life. Note: the thread of solitude runs consistently through the life of Jesus. He regularly went away to be alone with the Father.

Solitude is not so much about a place as it is about space—space to reflect, pray, think, listen, and *be*. As I’ve learned to practice solitude, the greatest impact is in relation to becoming free. I’m starting to get free from the seduction of believing that productivity equals importance and that busyness equals significance.

The Most Embarrassing Gap In My Leadership

I struggle with my prayer life. When I hear of guys who are strong in this area, I am both inspired and depressed at the same time.

As a leader I’ve often relied only on plans, strategies, skills, and methods to build the ministry. When you are a leader, you have a bent towards action, towards doing. Prayer places value on waiting, seeking, listening, discerning; it often feels passive.

Jesus rebuked those in the temple because God’s house should be a house of prayer. The *heartbeat of a God-centered and healthy ministry is the heartbeat of prayer*. As I thought about Jesus’ words, I remember thinking two things—“No one would ever accuse our church of being a house of prayer” and “No one would ever accuse me of being a man of prayer.”

God was rewiring my heart. As he did, I knew I would need to make some changes for prayer to become a priority in my life and ministry. So I began to structure prayer into my schedule with far more intentionality than ever before. I created a system that would modify my behavior and reinforce what God was doing in my heart. I blocked out time to be in the prayer room; I structured prayer first into our staff meetings (so it wasn’t just an afterthought); I developed a personal prayer team; and etc.

Over time prayer has become more natural, less transactional and more relational. And my intimacy and connection with God is growing.

Stay In Touch With Your Dark Side

I believe part of what it means to be spiritually healthy is to avoid losing touch with one’s own depravity. I must hold in balance my blessedness and brokenness. Yes, I am more blessed than I can even fathom, but I am also more broken than I can grasp.

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I'm astounded by how easily I still can be drawn to lust, greed, slander, dishonesty, or prejudice.

We hear a lot today about leveraging our strengths and maximizing our potential. But I need to realize my potential isn't all positive. I have the potential to destroy my marriage, divide a church, and bring disgrace to the name of Jesus.

Staying in touch with my depravity helps foster humility and nurture dependence. It also makes me want to pursue accountability. (Every godly leader knows you can't trust yourself). Another benefit is that it helps me be less critical and more loving toward people. At least for me, the more I have pondered my brokenness and the wonder of God's grace toward me, the more I see people differently and treat them a little more graciously.

In generations before us, believers practiced something called self-examination. This was the practice of getting up to the exam table and letting the Holy Spirit poke and prod and diagnose your soul's condition. Let me challenge you this week to set aside 30 minutes for self-examination. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what you need to see. It may be very enlightening.

Practicing The Presence of People

I know that to be a faithful pastor I have to love people. The challenge is trying to stay healthy enough so that I can *really* love people. When life and ministry move too fast, one of the casualties is the personal care and attention of those on our team. Without even being aware of it, our mindset towards people can slowly begin to change. Even though all vision is ultimately about impacting people, we can do it in a way that is impersonal and ultimately devaluing.

We need to slow down, and stay relationally connected to people. That means engaging at a personal level, and giving people the gift of *attention*. When you give someone your attention, you are saying "You

matter." That's a powerful gift. Besides slowing down, it means we have to be mentally and emotionally present with people.

Shock Absorbers For The Soul

In Matthew 11, Jesus was described as "gentle and humble." In my life and the life of other leaders, I've observed that when I'm emotionally empty and spiritually unhealthy, I am not gentle. Emotional vitality and spiritual health are like having a good set of shock absorbers for your soul. When shocks are working right, they help absorb life's bumps and potholes. But when they are worn out, the ride gets rough.

We need to be gentle with people. No matter what exterior they project, they are fragile, delicate, and easily hurt. We need to be gentle. That doesn't mean wimpy or passive; it does mean gracious and thoughtful.

Building Healthy Teams

Team Doesn't Have an "I" But It Does Have a "You"

If you want to talk about an organization's true spiritual health, you have to look at the health of the team that leads it. The first step to building a healthy staff is to grow and develop your team.

It all starts with personal care. The people on my team need to know I care about them personally, not just professionally. I must value them for who they are, not just what they can do. Second, for a team to be healthy there must be a sense of family. You must learn to laugh together, cry together, and resolve conflict together.

Don't let the only agenda items be business. Make building relationships and caring for each other a priority. You'll get healthier.

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Is Your Team Culture More Corporate Than Christlike?

Are the people on your team better Christ followers because of your leadership? Are those you lead better Christians because they've been hanging around you and your ministry? If you're going to have a spiritually healthy team, you must integrate these two qualities into the fabric of team life: authentic spirituality, and developing people.

Authentic spirituality: There must be a vibrant, life-giving God orientation to how we do team. We often mistakenly assume people are on track spiritually, so we focus all our efforts on the ministry's vision. We spend our meetings talking about plans; the books we give our staff are all about leadership; all the training is about ministry skill. We need to work hard to raise our team's spiritual temperature, and not assume it's "hot."

Develop people: Leaders often prefer to be players over being coaches. If we want healthy teams, we must learn the skills of a coach—comforting, encouraging, and challenging our people to grow and become their best—done in the context of a caring relationship. At the end of the day, building people is more important than building programs or buildings—and longer lasting as well.

Speak The Unspoken Rules

What creates dysfunction in a team is what creates dysfunction in any relationship: colliding expectations. With different personalities, backgrounds, and experiences we all show up with our own picture of what "team" means and how a team should function. Worse, most organizations don't articulate expectations regarding "how we do team around here."

Every organization has a team culture. Someone has said culture is the "unspoken rules of how things get done." For team health, it is imperative that someone

speak the unspoken rules. Leaders must take responsibility to bring clarity to the team culture. When I was pastoring I had our team develop together a team covenant—an agreement about how we would work together. It was a great team-building exercise. It also made it easier to hold people accountable, since everyone had developed the tenets and agreed to abide by them. And since we wrote them down, there was no confusion about what they were.

Show Up and Speak Up

Dishonesty creates dysfunction, and terminal niceness can be terminal to the health of a ministry. Most leaders are not very good at hard conversations. We beat around the bush, tap dance around conflict, and make nice. But a huge part of team health has to do with how well we interact and communicate.

As a leader, I must begin to create a safe environment, infused with trust, where we talk about the hard stuff and engage conflict in a healthy way. From a team member's standpoint, once I sense there is a safe environment, I have the responsibility to show up and speak up. I must engage and not hold back—the team needs my input.

Over the years I have seen more conflict caused by playing nice and trying to avoid conflict than by speaking up. Ironically, avoiding conflict usually ends up creating more in the end.

Bringing Your Soul Back To Life

Jeremiah has given me a road map on my journey back to spiritual health:

This is what the Lord says:

*"Stand at the crossroads and look;
Ask for the ancient paths,
Ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
And you will find rest for your souls."*

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If you are going to take the road that leads to spiritual health, you have to stand long enough to decide which way you are going to go. If you stay on the road you are on now, where are you going to end up?

Look at the past and learn from it—from your own, and others who have gone before. Ask for the “good way”—not the fast way, or busy way. The good way—and you will find rest for your souls. What an incredible promise! And one that so many of us in ministry desperately need.

The Pastor’s Perspective

Replenish is a welcome balance to the emphasis on leadership skills and techniques. After many years in ministry, I agree with Witt—it is possible to gain the leadership world and lose your soul. And especially for those of us in any kind of spiritual leadership, that isn’t a trade we should be willing to make. I’ve seen first-hand that it is possible to build a church via good leadership, exercising your gifts and your experience, without depending on God. But it’s dangerous, especially for the leader. We can be duped by our success into thinking we are personally doing well, when we aren’t, all because we are looking at the wrong thing—or at least at an incomplete picture.

I was encouraged and challenged by this book. It caused me to take a hard look at the state of my own soul, and also at my leadership. In particular, I loved his question: “Are the people around you better people, and better Christ-followers, because of your leadership?” That question drives me to my knees; if the answer isn’t YES, I don’t think it matters how big our church or ministry is. It may not be true for everybody—I don’t think we can expect everyone to be better—but at least are those closest to us better?

Frankly, I couldn’t give an unambiguously positive answer to that question, and that is one of the most sobering moments I’ve had in a long time. It’s making me do some hard thinking about what I’m really doing and what I’m producing or influencing in the

people around me. I don’t think it’s possible for me to not be a visionary, or not want to grow the church—that’s just how I am wired. But I am now asking the question—“Am I contagious?” Is my walk with God something I want to reproduce in people? Or said another way, do people naturally want to have the kind of life in Christ that I exhibit?

I encourage you to ask those same questions. They are uncomfortable, but important. And this is coming from a guy who is totally committed to growing as a leader and improving my leadership skills. I think leadership growth is vitally important. But I don’t want to *only* do that. In Psalm 78:72 it says David “shepherded with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.” I want to have both integrity of heart and skillful hands; I want to lead with excellence and maintain an intimate