

## Guarding Your Life

### *Staying Healthy in the Ministry*

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Personality is not substitute for character.

*“Spiritual leaders... influence others not by the power of their own personality alone, but by that personality... empowered by the Holy Spirit. Because they permit the Holy Spirit undisputed control of their lives, the Spirit’s power can flow through them to others unhindered.”*

J.O. Sanders

The key to a disciple-making ministry is faithful men and women. What are the qualifications for a faithful person? What qualities of godliness must be characteristics of their life?

#### *Obedience*

They have adopted as their objective in life the same objective God sets forth in the scriptures.

#### *Surrender*

They are willing to pay any price to have the will of God fulfilled in their life.

#### *Dependence*

They have a love for the word of God.

#### *Humility*

They have a servant heart

#### *Self Sacrifice*

They put no confidence in the flesh

#### *Interdependence*

They do not have an independent spirit.

#### *Love*

They have a love for people

#### *Maturity*

They have learned to discipline their lives

#### *Grace*

They do not allow themselves to become trapped in bitterness.

Disciple are made, not born

W.A. Henricksen

Key Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5-8

## Who's Guarding the Village?

A group of warriors leave their village to fight a rival tribe. As they turn back to look at their village they see it go up in smoke. They left no one to guard the village and no watchmen to look out potential danger.

So too it is in our own personal lives. We get so busy doing things for everyone else that we fail to pay enough attention to “guarding our village” (our personal lives).

We will now examine the 10 areas that are most common areas that we need to guard in order for us to protect our villages and stay healthy in the ministry.

### **Pride**

Pride is dangerous to unwary leaders because it can be rebellious in the way it creeps into their lives.

*Pride tempts leaders to take the credit from others.*

It is demoralising for followers to labor on behalf of their organisation, only to have their leader enjoy the accolades for the success.

Pride drives leaders to seek the limelight. Pride moves them to magnify their own involvement and to minimise the efforts of others.

Biblical Example: King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)

We must never let our ego cam between our job and us.

*Pride makes leaders unteachable.*

Pride closes the leaders mind. Their pride convinces them that they alone possess the depth of insight for success and they become resistant to wise counsel. They grow impatient with those who do not readily accept their opinions.

Biblical Example: King Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:7)

If there is any quality common to all effective spiritual leaders,, it is a teachable spirit.

*Pride causes leaders to think they are self-sufficient*

Pride exalts people to think they are self-sufficient. Just as King Saul was humbled when he presumed upon God, so God will humble leaders who act as if they are independent of God's grace. Leaders are most vulnerable in the area of their greatest strength. Max DePress warns, “Leaders are fragile precisely at the point of their strengths, liable to fail at the height of their success.” People fall hardest from their highest points.

Wise leaders realise that they can do nothing apart from their intimate relationship with Christ (John 15:5)

*Pride leads to loss of compassion*

Let us not be leaders like Nero and Marie Antoinette. Legend has it that Nero sat and listened to classical music while Rome burned and upon hearing the reports of the French people not having bread to eat Marie Antoinette is replied, “Let them eat cake.”

We should have the same attitude as the Apostle Paul. In writing to the troubled church in Corinth, he stated: “There is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? (2 Cor.11:28-29)

True leaders never lose sight of their responsibility to care for their followers.

*Pride makes leaders vulnerable.*

Pride is a sin and pride will do what sin does. It destroys. Leaders who allow pride to grow unchecked will eventually lose everything - their relationships, their credibility, and ultimately their position as a leader.

“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling” Proverbs 16:18

“God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6

## **Sexual Sin**

Sexual sin has the power to destroy a career, a family, and a reputation, all in one blow. Leaders can avoid this pitfall if they proactively develop the following safeguards:

*Safeguard One: Leaders make themselves accountable*

The time to buy a smoke alarm is when you build the house not when the house is on fire. Prudent leaders are proactive; they enlist at least two people as accountability partners and give them the freedom to regularly question their moral purity.

*Safeguard Two: Leaders heed their own counsel*

Spiritual leaders know what sexual sin is all about and the consequences that are involved. Spiritual leaders must understand that they are no more immune to sexual sin than those they are leading.

*Safeguard Three: Leaders consider the consequences*

Leaders carefully and regularly contemplate the consequences if they were to commit sexual sin. They guard themselves from the attitude that they are somehow exempt from the dangers that have derailed others.

Astute leaders cultivate the habit of regularly pondering the devastating effects of sexual sin.

*Safeguard Four: Leaders develop healthy habits*

Careful leaders can take practical steps to protect themselves from sexual temptation. Choose to be a Joseph who ran from the advances of Potiphar’s wife than a David who committed adultery with Bathsheba after he witnessed her having a bath. Remember that temptation itself is not a sin it is when you follow through the temptation like David that you digress.

*Safeguard Five: Leaders pray and ask others to pray with and for them.*

God, in his grace, will build a wall of protection around those who genuinely desire moral purity. Temptation will come and leaders who neglect their relationship with God and fail to build safeguards into their lives will inevitably yield to temptation.

“A sensible man considers his steps.” Proverbs 14:15

## Cynicism

Leadership is a people business and people will let you down. If leaders always focus on their organization's problems and weaknesses then the attention of their people will invariably be drawn there too. When people concentrate on the negative, they lose the zeal and optimism required to overcome difficult challenges. Negative leaders breed negative followers.

True leaders focus on that which is right and on what gives hope, not on what is wrong. It is crucial that leaders guard their attitudes.

## Greed

Like many things, money and possessions can be either good or bad in a leader's life. A leadership position often brings greater material rewards. While a sizeable income is not in itself wrong, the relentless pursuit of one is.

The hunger for wealth and possessions can destroy spiritual leaders. When leaders hunger for wealth, they can also be tempted to act unethically.

Wise leaders know that the measure of their success is not the size of their bank account but the quality of their lives. Astute leaders invest their lives in things that bring the most lasting and gratifying rewards.

## Mental Laziness

Many of today's problems are not generally solved through brute strength but through creative, inspired thinking. Problem solving is an essential function of leadership, so leaders cannot afford to become intellectually stagnant. Good leaders never stop learning. They seek the company of wise people. They read books and articles stretch their thinking. They read the biographies of great leaders and thinkers.

Spiritual leaders regularly test what they read against the eternal wisdom found in Scripture. A commitment to learn and to change produces a growing level of leadership competence. It is no longer enough to acquire an education in order to *get* a job. Additional learning is mandatory to *keep* a job.

## Oversensitivity

People who cannot handle criticism should not apply for leadership positions. Being criticised, second-guessed, and having one's motives questioned are unpleasant but inevitable aspects of leadership. Great leaders are not immune to criticism; in fact, the criticism they receive is sometimes the most venomous.

If a leader receives ten words of support for every one word of criticism, which voice will ring loudest? The critics voice, of course. Criticism generally carries more weight with people than praise.

Constructive criticism is good for leaders. They should not only receive such input graciously; they should invite those around them to give it.

How should leaders respond to unfounded feedback from hostile critics?

Honestly approach the criticism to see if there is any merit in the feedback. It may be hurtful, but attentive leaders can usually learn something, even if they are unfairly maligned. Leaders must face criticism with integrity before God.

Spiritual leaders must keep criticism in perspective. Criticism will come and it will hurt, but it must not be allowed to derail leaders from God's call upon their lives.

When leaders know they are doing exactly what God is asking, no amount of animosity will move them to do anything else.

## **Spiritual Lethargy**

Most leaders would list their relationship with God as their number one priority. Well that is where it should be. Yet with so many jobs to coordinate and so many people to motivate, they inadvertently relegate their spiritual life to a place of unimportance in their schedule. The danger for them to neglect their time with God is more subtle, because their bibles are open so often for sermon prep, counselling and other religious work.

I can remember that for me one of the most spiritually dry times was during time at Bible College and the main reason being is that I started to view the bible more as a textbook rather than the living word of God. I was challenged by my spiritual to take six months off from regular ministry within the local church and work harder at becoming intimate with God and his word.

I have also learnt the importance of practising the presence of God. Here are some suggestions to help you guard this “village”:

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### *Practice God's Presence*

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*Being persuaded that God is everywhere present on all sides, we praise Him as we till the ground, we sing hymns as we sow the seed, we feel His inspiration in all we do. (Clement of Alexander)*

The Goal: Increase your level of awareness of God who is always with you

How can we practise the presence of God?

#### **A. Develop Reminders of God’s Presence**

Examples:

## B. Use Your Senses to Experience God

Sight

Sound

Taste

Touch

Smell

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. *Create Space for God*

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*Someone has said: If the devil can't make you bad, he'll make you busy.*

What do you need to stop doing to create space for God?

What do you need to do to create space for God?

## **Domestic Neglect**

When holding positions of influence and responsibility, they often struggle to balance their role as a leader at work and as a leader at home.

Nelson Mandela sacrificed everything he had to liberate his people from oppression. Mandela eventually achieved his goal, won the Nobel Peace Prize and was elected president of South Africa in the first democratic elections. Yet Madiba suffered two divorces and spent many years behind bars unable to have contact with his children. Mandela confessed that although he loved his wives, his work always came first and his marriages suffered as a result.

Every leader must balance the responsibilities of their leadership role with their commitment to their families. Those who wholly sacrifice their families may achieve great success in the public eye but privately suffer tremendous personal turmoil.

Leaders' children can represent the future generation of leaders. Emerging leaders at home have the potential to impact the world even more than their parents did.

We should also get into the habit of marking significant events like birthdays and anniversaries and also events at your child's school that are considered special events.

## **Administrative Carelessness**

Leaders are nature visionaries. They may focus so much attention on the vision of where their organisation is going that they neglect to build the kind of organisation that can actually arrive at the destination.

Ultimately it is the leaders responsibility to ensure that the organisation is healthy. Wise leaders understand that organisations are ultimately made up, not of vision statements or constitutions or long-range plans or core values – but of people. People are the driving force behind organisations. Therefore, while leaders are constantly delegating tasks to their people, they are also regularly monitoring the attitudes, effectiveness and concerns of their people to ensure that the organisation is functioning at its optimum potential.

Leaders need to become adept in two areas or their organisations will collapse from within: conflict resolution and communication.

Leadership positions are not for those who seek to avoid conflict at all costs. Characterless leaders avoid people they know are unhappy or upset. Effective leaders will face problems head on. Few people actually enjoy addressing conflict, but experienced leaders know that a single problem neglected today can multiply into a cluster of problems tomorrow. We must practice *conflict resolution* rather than conflict management.

Clear, timely communication is absolutely essential to a successful organisation. Leaders who are out of touch with their people will one day find themselves out of touch with the organisation they are meant to be leading.

## **Prolonged Position Holding**

“It is better to leave them longing than loathing.” Good speakers know and follow this maxim. Skilled preachers recognise that if they haven't made their point after thirty minutes, they might as well send their parishioners home to their roast chickens.

On a larger scale wise leaders also know when the time has come to exit graciously and allow a new leader to step in.

Astute leaders read the organisational signs and know when it is time to leave.

## Steps to Guarding the Village

### Step One

Develop a healthy awareness of the pitfalls that can bring failure and disgrace to you as a leader.

### Step Two

Put safeguards in place that will provide protection in times of temptation or indecision.

### Step Three

Leaders should have before them the continual reminder that

- (a) their organisation is more about people than it is about productivity
- (b) they are not indispensable
- (c) the most effective, efficient thing they can do for their organisation is to maintain a close, vibrant relationship with God.

### Step Four

Set up a Support Group. This group should consist of three to five godly people whom you respect and with whom you will feel free to be completely honest. Group members should be the same gender.

Here is a list of questions to consider both individually and as a part of your small-group discussion.

1. Do I pray regularly with at least one other leader?
2. Are there other leaders with whom I am free to be candid about my personal struggles?
3. Who holds me accountable to follow through on what I know to be God's will?
4. What safeguards have I built around my relationship with my spouse? Are they adequate to protect me from temptation?
5. How am I presently studying and applying God's word to my life?
6. Have I built safeguards around my time with God?
7. Do I have people who are willing to challenge my actions when they think they are harmful?
8. Do I have people who are willing to challenge my actions when they think they are harmful?
9. Are the fruits of the Spirit growing in me? Am I becoming more and more like Christ?



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