Leadership IN Practice

A LEADERSHIP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

GRACE OVER PERFECTION

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A 12-Session Leadership Development Experience

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WELCOME

Welcome to Leadership in Practice

This guide is designed for leaders who want more than a chapter recap. Each gathering uses a carefully selected theme from Grace Over Perfection to prompt honest conversation, practical discernment, and one action participants can carry into their daily work and lives.

The twelve sessions move through the book's five stages in order: Recognize, Release, Reframe, Rebuild, and Sustain. The final gathering brings the journey together with the 30-Day Grace Challenge. Reading assignments follow the book's sequence, but the discussion topics are selected for depth and relevance rather than equal page counts.

A COMPLETE, INDEPENDENT RESOURCE

This guide can be used by professional book clubs, workplace leadership teams, study clubs, peer circles, or individuals. Participants should have their own copy of Grace Over Perfection to engage with the original reflections and Field Notes. Its sister guide, Faith in Practice, follows the same twelve session titles for groups who would also like to explore each theme through Scripture. The two guides are written to complement one another, and neither is required to use the other.

A Suggested 55 to 60 Minute Gathering

- Opening Reflection and facilitator prompt: 5 minutes
- Part One, Conversation Starters: 10 minutes
- Part Two, Go Deeper: 20 minutes
- Part Three, Group Exercise: 15 minutes
- Part Four, From Insight to Action: 5 to 10 minutes

Facilitator Notes

- Invite experience, not performance. Participants may pass on any question.
- Protect confidentiality. Use hypothetical examples when personal or workplace situations are sensitive.
- Do not attempt every question. Choose the ones most relevant to your group.
- Keep the distinction between support and accountability visible. Avoid turning every conversation into advice-giving.
- Encourage one realistic action, not a long list of resolutions.

TWELVE SESSIONS

Session Map

#	SESSION	STAGE	READING	GROUP EXERCISE	OUR DATE
01	The Weight We Quietly Carry	Recognize	pp. 2–7	What's in Your Backpack?	
02	When Caring Becomes Perfectionism	Recognize	pp. 11–16	The Standards Filter	
03	The Rules We Never Questioned	Release	pp. 20–24	Rewrite the Rule	
04	Grace Is Not the Absence of Accountability	Reframe	pp. 28–30	The Grace-and-Standards Conversation	
05	The Hidden Cost of Perfection	Reframe	pp. 31–33	Control Versus Stewardship	
06	Being Needed Is Not the Same as Being Valued	Rebuild	pp. 37–39	Redefining the Scorecard	
07	The Courage to Receive Help	Rebuild	pp. 40–42	The Specific Ask	
08	Rest Is Not a Reward	Sustain	pp. 46–48	Design a Recovery Boundary	
09	Building Everyday Resilience	Sustain	pp. 49–51	The Ten-Minute Practice	
10	The Myth of Being Caught Up	Sustain	pp. 55–57	Define Enough for Today	
11	Becoming the Leader You Can Sustain	Sustain	pp. 58–60	The Sustainability Test	
12	Grace as an Ongoing Leadership Practice	The Practice Continues	pp. 64–82	Your 30-Day Leadership Practice	

> *Reading pages refer to the print edition of Grace Over Perfection. Bring your copy of the book and a pen to every session.*

LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

A Leadership Discussion Guide for Book Clubs and Study Clubs Reading Grace Over Perfection: A Leadership Field Guide for Sustainable Growth & Everyday Resilience

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SESSION 01 / STAGE ONE: RECOGNIZE

The Weight We Quietly Carry

FROM THE BOOK

Section One: The Weight We Quietly Pick Up · Read pages 2–7, including "The Backpack We Never Put Down," "The Responsible One," and Field Notes.

SESSION PURPOSE

Recognize the invisible responsibilities leaders accumulate, distinguish supporting others from owning their work, and identify one practical way to lead with greater intention.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What if the very quality that makes you dependable is also making your leadership unsustainable?

Opening Reflection

Leadership often begins with a willingness to help. We notice a gap, anticipate a problem, or step in when someone needs support. Those choices can reflect genuine care and sound judgment. But when they accumulate without examination, helpfulness can quietly become an expectation that we must handle everything. The question is not whether responsibility matters. It is whether we can tell the difference between what is ours to carry, what should be shared, and what belongs to someone else. A leader can be capable of doing something without being the person who should always do it.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *When did you first become known as "the dependable one"? How has that reputation served you, and what has it cost?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite brief responses from several participants; avoid requiring anyone to disclose a private situation.

- Where do you notice the greatest accumulation of invisible responsibility in your life or work?
- What makes it rewarding to be the person others can count on?
- When does that identity become difficult to sustain?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A capable manager routinely corrects unfinished reports after hours. The reports are accurate, but the team no longer checks its own work. The manager calls this "protecting quality." What is the longer-term cost?

- In "The Backpack We Never Put Down," responsibilities accumulate gradually. Why are small commitments so difficult to reassess once they become routine?
- How does "The Responsible One" complicate the idea that being dependable is always an advantage?
- What is the difference between helping a colleague succeed and preventing that colleague from developing ownership?
- How might a leader unintentionally train a team to rely on them for decisions others could make?
- Which is harder for you: asking for help, delegating, or allowing someone else to do something differently?
- What does a team lose when one person consistently absorbs the consequences of unclear expectations?
- What would a respectful handoff sound like for the manager in the situation above?
- What would responsible leadership look like if it were measured by the strength of the team rather than the amount one person carries?

Part Three | Group Exercise

WHAT'S IN YOUR BACKPACK? · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Individually, list five responsibilities, concerns, or expectations that take up meaningful energy. For each, ask: Did I intentionally accept this? Is it mine to own? What would happen if I shared, returned, or released it?

KEEP	SHARE	RETURN	RELEASE
Mine to fulfill	*Best carried with others*	*Belongs to someone else*	*No longer necessary*

Discussion: Which category was hardest to use? What belief or fear made that choice difficult?

FACILITATOR NOTE

The goal is discernment, not disengagement. Participants may keep their lists private. Encourage concrete examples without turning the conversation into a performance review.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to identify one modest change they can test before the next gathering.

ONE RESPONSIBILITY I WILL RECONSIDER:

ONE CONVERSATION OR ACTION THAT WOULD HELP:

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A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Watch for the moment you automatically volunteer, fix, follow up, or take ownership. What prompted your response?

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Before accepting one additional responsibility, ask: "Is this mine to carry, or am I simply accustomed to carrying it?"

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "The Responsible One" on page 5. Consider whether being needed has become part of how you measure your value.

CLOSING QUESTION

What might become possible if I stopped measuring my commitment by how much I am willing to carry?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 2: WHEN CARING BECOMES PERFECTIONISM

Next time, we will examine the difference between meaningful excellence and expectations that quietly become self-punishment. As you move through the week, notice when "I just care" becomes the reason you cannot step away.

SESSION 02 / STAGE ONE: RECOGNIZE

When Caring Becomes Perfectionism

FROM THE BOOK

Section Two · Read pages 11–16, including "I Just Care," "Excellence Without Self-Punishment," and Field Notes.

SESSION PURPOSE

Distinguish healthy excellence from perfectionism, examine how a leader's response to mistakes shapes team culture, and separate essential standards from personal preferences.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

When does a commitment to excellence become a demand that nothing may go wrong?

Opening Reflection

Caring about quality is a strength. It prompts preparation, attention to detail, and follow-through. But care can become difficult to distinguish from control when every imperfection feels personal. Leaders may revise work repeatedly, hesitate to delegate, or interpret ordinary mistakes as evidence that they have failed. Healthy excellence asks whether the work meets a meaningful standard. Perfectionism asks whether the work can protect us from criticism, disappointment, or uncertainty. Those are different goals, and they produce very different environments for the people we lead.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Think of a time you said "I just care" to explain why you could not let something go. What were you actually trying to protect?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Keep this round light and conversational; the goal is recognition, not confession.

- What is one area of your work where you hold yourself to an especially high standard?
- How did you learn what "good enough" looks like in your profession?
- When has a high standard served you or your team especially well?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A team member presents a strong proposal with a minor formatting error. The leader spends most of the review discussing the error, and the team member stops volunteering ideas. How could the leader preserve standards without teaching fear?

- What signals tell you that you are pursuing quality rather than reassurance?
- In "I Just Care," how does genuine concern become a justification for overwork?
- How does your response to your own mistakes influence team culture?
- Which standards in your work are essential, and which are personal preferences?
- What happens when people believe their work must be flawless before it can be shared?
- How might self-punishment undermine learning after a setback?
- What does "Excellence Without Self-Punishment" look like on an ordinary workday?
- How would you respond differently to the proposal in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE STANDARDS FILTER · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one recurring task or deliverable. Define three nonnegotiable quality standards and two preferences you could release. Then consider how you would communicate the difference to your team.

STANDARD	PREFERENCE
Essential to quality, safety, or trust	*How I like it done, not what it requires*

Discussion: Which preference was hardest to release? How would your team experience the difference if you did?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Some participants may discover that most of their "standards" are preferences. Treat that as useful insight rather than a criticism of their professionalism.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to name one preference they will test releasing before the next gathering.

ONE PREFERENCE I WILL STOP TREATING AS A STANDARD:

HOW I WILL RESPOND THE NEXT TIME SOMEONE MAKES A MINOR MISTAKE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Pay attention to your internal reaction to a small mistake, whether it is yours or someone else's. What story do you tell about it?

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

In one feedback conversation, name what is working before naming the flaw.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "Excellence Without Self-Punishment" and identify one standard that would be both kinder and clearer.

CLOSING QUESTION

What if the people I lead are learning more from how I respond to mistakes than from the standards I set?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 3: THE RULES WE NEVER QUESTIONED

Next time, we will examine the unwritten rules that shape how leaders work, rest, and measure their value. As you move through the week, notice the word "should" in your self-talk.

SESSION 03 / STAGE TWO: RELEASE

The Rules We Never Questioned

FROM THE BOOK

Section Three · Read pages 20–24, including "What If Nothing Is Wrong?," "The Five False Rules," and Field Notes.

SESSION PURPOSE

Identify the unspoken rules that shape leadership behavior, examine where they came from and what they cost, and replace one with a more useful principle.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What if some of your strongest leadership rules were never consciously chosen?

Opening Reflection

Many expectations arrive long before we hold a leadership title. We learn to be useful, avoid disappointing people, earn rest, or handle difficulty privately. Over time these beliefs begin to sound like facts. They influence how we work, delegate, evaluate ourselves, and interpret other people's choices. The book's five false rules offer a practical starting point. Rather than dismissing every old belief, leaders can examine what each rule was trying to protect and whether it still serves the people and purpose in front of them. Releasing an unhelpful rule creates room for a more accurate one.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *What is one piece of "leadership advice" you absorbed early in your career that you have never seriously questioned?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to share examples from early jobs or first leadership roles.

- Who modeled leadership for you early in your career?
- What did you learn from them about what a "good leader" does?
- Which of those lessons still guide you today?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A newly promoted leader believes "a good manager never needs help." As workload rises, they hide delays until the team misses a deadline. What belief needs to change before the workflow can improve?

- Which of the five false rules feels most familiar to you?
- Where did you first learn that rule, and what did it help you accomplish?
- What evidence suggests the rule is no longer useful?
- How does "What If Nothing Is Wrong?" challenge the assumption that exhaustion signals a personal failure?
- How does an unspoken rule become a team expectation?
- What happens to a team when its leader follows a rule no one has ever named?
- What more sustainable belief could replace the rule you identified?
- What would the leader in the situation above need to say openly?

Part Three | Group Exercise

REWRITE THE RULE · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one false rule from the book. Complete the three statements below, and then translate your new principle into one observable behavior. Share only what feels appropriate.

I LEARNED TO BELIEVE...	IT HAS COST ME...	A MORE USEFUL PRINCIPLE IS...
The rule as you absorbed it	*The impact on you or others*	*The replacement you choose*

Discussion: What would someone notice about you if you lived by the new principle for a month?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Rules often carry emotional history. Honor what each rule once protected before inviting participants to replace it.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to identify one behavior that reflects their new principle.

THE RULE I AM READY TO RELEASE:

ONE BEHAVIOR THAT REFLECTS MY NEW PRINCIPLE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Listen for the word "should" in your thoughts and conversations. Whose voice does it sound like?

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Replace one inherited rule with a deliberate leadership choice, and act on it once this week.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "The Five False Rules" and test your replacement principle against a real situation.

CLOSING QUESTION

Which of my leadership habits are actually choices, and which are simply rules I inherited?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 4: GRACE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Next time, we will explore how leaders can hold clear standards while treating people with dignity. As you move through the week, notice the conversations you are postponing.

SESSION 04 / STAGE THREE: REFRAME

Grace Is Not the Absence of Accountability

FROM THE BOOK

Section Four · Read pages 28–30, "Grace Is Not the Absence of Accountability."

SESSION PURPOSE

Reframe grace and accountability as partners rather than opposites, and practice a conversation that is both clear about expectations and respectful of the person.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

Can we be compassionate without becoming permissive?

Opening Reflection

Some leaders avoid accountability because they fear being harsh. Others believe that holding people to expectations leaves no room for human difficulty. Both assumptions create unnecessary tension. Grace does not erase a standard; it shapes the way we address the person responsible for meeting it. Accountability becomes more humane when expectations are clear, circumstances are understood, and next steps are specific. A leader can acknowledge someone's experience without changing the facts of an unmet commitment. Respect and responsibility are not competing values.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Think of a leader who held you accountable in a way that made you better. What did they do that made it work?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Encourage participants to draw on experiences of both giving and receiving accountability.

- What do you tend to do when a conversation becomes uncomfortable?
- What did you learn about accountability from your first manager?
- What makes a difficult conversation feel fair to you?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

An employee misses an important deadline while managing a genuine personal hardship. The team has absorbed the impact twice. How can a leader respond with care while addressing the repeated performance issue?

- What is the difference between understanding a circumstance and excusing an outcome?
- How do unclear expectations create avoidable accountability conflicts?
- What language communicates dignity during a difficult conversation?
- When have you avoided accountability in the name of being kind?
- What does the rest of the team learn when a leader avoids a needed conversation?
- How can a leader offer support without making promises they cannot keep?
- What role does follow-up play in making accountability feel fair?
- What follow-up would make the conversation in the situation above both fair and effective?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE GRACE-AND-STANDARDS CONVERSATION · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose a real or hypothetical situation. Draft four sentences using the structure below. Then practice in pairs, with the listener paying attention to both clarity and respect.

FACT	CONTEXT	EXPECTATION	SUPPORT
Name the observable behavior	*Invite their perspective*	*Restate the standard*	*Agree on help and follow-up*

Discussion: Which sentence was hardest to write? What did the listener notice about tone?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage hypothetical examples when real situations involve confidential personnel matters. The goal is practicing the structure, not resolving a specific case.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to identify one conversation they will prepare for using this structure.

ONE CONVERSATION I HAVE BEEN POSTPONING:

MY OPENING SENTENCE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Watch for moments when discomfort makes you postpone a needed conversation or soften it until the message disappears.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Have one clear, compassionate conversation about an expectation.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to the book's distinction between grace and the absence of accountability before your next feedback conversation.

CLOSING QUESTION

Do the people I lead know exactly what I expect, and do they know I am on their side?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 5: THE HIDDEN COST OF PERFECTION

Next time, we will look at what perfection costs the leader and the team. As you move through the week, notice when you redo work that was already acceptable.

SESSION 05 / STAGE THREE: REFRAME

The Hidden Cost of Perfection

FROM THE BOOK

Section Four · Read pages 31–33, "Who Benefits From Your Perfection?" and Field Notes.

SESSION PURPOSE

Examine what a leader's need for perfection protects, who pays its cost, and how to replace personal control with reasonable safeguards.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

Who is actually helped when a leader cannot tolerate imperfection?

Opening Reflection

Perfection may look admirable from a distance. Up close, it can slow decisions, silence contributions, and make a leader the final checkpoint for everything. The desire to prevent mistakes may become a desire to prevent uncertainty. That shift changes how people experience the leader. The most useful question is not "How do I stop caring?" but "What is this need for perfection protecting?" Leaders who can name the fear beneath control are better positioned to choose appropriate safeguards, share decisions, and create room for responsible experimentation.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Where in your work do you find yourself being the "final checkpoint," even when you do not need to be?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite humor where appropriate; most leaders recognize this pattern quickly.

- What is one task you have a hard time letting anyone else finish?
- How do you feel when work goes out without your review?
- Has anyone ever pointed out your perfectionism to you? How did you respond?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A department head rewrites every presentation before it goes to senior leadership. The team stops bringing original ideas and waits for instructions. The department head says, "I'm just making sure we look professional."

- What fears can hide behind a desire for flawless results?
- Who benefits from a leader's meticulous control, and who pays the cost?
- How does perfectionism affect speed, creativity, and ownership on a team?
- Where is close review truly necessary, and where is it habitual?
- What does a team stop doing when the leader always has the final word?
- How might a leader create safe boundaries for experimentation?
- What is the difference between a safeguard and a bottleneck?
- What would a healthier review process look like for the department head in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

CONTROL VERSUS STEWARDSHIP · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one current project. Place its uncertainties and moving parts in the appropriate column below. Then identify one reasonable quality check that does not require your personal control of every step.

WHAT I CAN INFLUENCE	WHAT I CANNOT GUARANTEE
Preparation, clarity, resources, timing	*Reactions, results, every detail*

Discussion: Which item did you want to place in the first column even though it belongs in the second?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Participants may push back that their industry requires precision. Acknowledge real quality and safety requirements, and focus the conversation on reviews that exist out of habit rather than necessity.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to choose one review or checkpoint to adjust before the next gathering.

ONE CHECKPOINT I WILL HAND OFF OR REMOVE:

THE SAFEGUARD THAT WILL REPLACE MY PERSONAL REVIEW:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice the urge to redo someone else's acceptable work, and what you tell yourself when it arises.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Let one agreed-upon outcome stand without adding a personal finishing touch.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "Who Benefits From Your Perfection?" and consider the experience of the people on your team.

CLOSING QUESTION

What would my team create if I stopped being the final checkpoint for everything?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 6: BEING NEEDED IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING VALUED

Next time, we will explore how leaders measure their own value. As you move through the week, notice how you feel when someone solves a problem without you.

SESSION 06 / STAGE FOUR: REBUILD

Being Needed Is Not the Same as Being Valued

FROM THE BOOK

Section Five · Read pages 37–39, "Being Needed Is Not the Same as Being Valued."

SESSION PURPOSE

Separate a leader's value from their indispensability, and redefine leadership success in terms of the team's growing capability.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

If your team could thrive without your constant intervention, would you feel successful or unnecessary?

Opening Reflection

Being needed can be deeply rewarding. It signals trust and competence, and it often brings visible appreciation. But if a leader's sense of worth depends on being indispensable, the leader may resist building systems or developing others who could share the work. Value is broader than availability. A leader can contribute through judgment, encouragement, strategic direction, and the development of others. In fact, the ability of a team to function well without constant rescue can be evidence that leadership is working.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *When was the last time you felt truly valuable at work? Were you solving a problem, or helping someone else solve it?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Encourage participants to reflect on both their current and past roles.

- What are you known for being "the go-to person" for?
- How did that reputation develop?
- What would happen if you were unavailable for two weeks?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A founder proudly says, "Nothing important happens unless I approve it." Staff members are frustrated by delays, but the founder interprets their dependence as loyalty. What needs to change?

- When do you feel most valuable as a leader?
- What is the difference between being trusted and being required for every decision?
- How can recognition unintentionally reward overfunctioning?
- What systems would reduce dependence on you without reducing quality?
- What emotions might arise when others succeed without your involvement?
- How does a leader's need to be needed affect succession planning?
- What would it look like to measure your success by what others can now do?
- How would you redefine success for the founder in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

REDEFINING THE SCORECARD · Suggested time: 15 minutes

List three ways you currently measure your value as a leader. Replace at least one activity-based measure with a development-based measure, and identify how you would observe progress.

ACTIVITY-BASED	DEVELOPMENT-BASED
"I solved every issue"	*"Others can solve recurring issues responsibly"*

Discussion: Which new measure would be most uncomfortable for you to adopt? Why?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Some participants may feel exposed by this exercise. Normalize the experience: almost every high-performing leader has tied part of their worth to being needed.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to identify one person they will help become more independent.

ONE NEW WAY I WILL MEASURE MY LEADERSHIP:

ONE PERSON I WILL HELP BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice your reaction when someone solves a problem without you.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Publicly recognize another person's independent contribution.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to the distinction between being needed and being valued, and notice where you blur the two.

CLOSING QUESTION

What would my leadership look like if my success were measured by what others no longer need me for?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 7: THE COURAGE TO RECEIVE HELP

Next time, we will look at why receiving help is often harder for leaders than offering it. As you move through the week, notice how often you say "I've got it."

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SESSION 07 / STAGE FOUR: REBUILD

The Courage to Receive Help

FROM THE BOOK

Section Five · Read pages 40–42, "When Help Feels Like Failure" and Field Notes.

SESSION PURPOSE

Explore why leaders resist receiving help, distinguish asking for help from abandoning accountability, and practice making a clear, specific request.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

Why can receiving help feel more difficult than offering it?

Opening Reflection

Leaders often know how to offer support but struggle to receive it. Asking for help can feel like exposing a weakness, creating a burden, or surrendering control. Yet refusing assistance can make the leader a bottleneck and prevent genuine collaboration. Receiving help is a leadership skill. It requires knowing what support is needed, asking clearly, and allowing others to contribute in their own way. The goal is not to transfer responsibility carelessly but to build shared capacity and honest working relationships.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Think of the last time someone offered to help you. How did you respond, and why?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Keep the tone light; many leaders find this topic surprisingly personal.

- What kind of help do you find easiest to accept?
- What kind of help do you almost always turn down?
- Who on your team would gladly help if you asked?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A project leader quietly works weekends rather than asking a colleague with available capacity to assist. The project finishes, but the leader is resentful and exhausted. What could have been different?

- What assumptions make it difficult for you to ask for help?
- In "When Help Feels Like Failure," what connects asking for help with a sense of personal inadequacy?
- How is asking for help different from abandoning accountability?
- What would a clear, respectful request for support include?
- What can leaders learn by allowing others to contribute differently than they would?
- How does refusing help affect trust and team development?
- What message does a leader send when they never ask for anything?
- How would you rewrite the project leader's approach in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE SPECIFIC ASK · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Identify a task or decision where support would make a real difference. Write a request that includes each element below. Then practice asking a partner without apologizing for having a legitimate need.

OUTCOME	HELP NEEDED	TIMEFRAME	AUTHORITY
What needs to happen	*The specific support*	*By when*	*What they can decide*

Discussion: What did you notice about your tone or word choice when you practiced the request?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Watch for participants who soften their requests until they disappear. Gently invite them to try again with fewer qualifiers.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to commit to making one real request before the next gathering.

THE HELP I WILL ASK FOR:

THE PERSON I WILL ASK, AND WHEN:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice when you say "I've got it" before considering whether someone else could help.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Make one specific, appropriate request for support.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "When Help Feels Like Failure" and notice your reaction to receiving help this week.

CLOSING QUESTION

What is my refusal to ask for help teaching the people who are watching me lead?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 8: REST IS NOT A REWARD

Next time, we will examine how leaders think about rest and recovery. As you move through the week, notice what you believe must be finished before you can stop.

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SESSION 08 / STAGE FIVE: SUSTAIN

Rest Is Not a Reward

FROM THE BOOK

Section Six · Read pages 46–48, "Rest Should Not Be a Reward."

SESSION PURPOSE

Challenge the belief that rest must be earned, identify the systems that make recovery difficult, and design one protected recovery boundary.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What changes when rest is treated as part of responsible leadership rather than a prize for finishing?

Opening Reflection

Many leaders postpone rest until the work is complete. The problem is that meaningful work rarely reaches a permanent stopping point. When rest must be earned through completion, recovery becomes perpetually negotiable. Sustainable performance requires rhythms that can survive a demanding season. Rest is not the opposite of commitment. It is one of the conditions that makes thoughtful judgment, patience, and consistency possible over time.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *When did you last take time off without checking messages? What made it possible, or impossible?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to share honestly, including about vacations they did not fully take.

- What does real rest look like for you?
- What usually interrupts it?
- What did your workplace culture teach you about taking time off?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A manager regularly cancels planned time off whenever a new issue arises. The team has learned that all decisions can wait for the manager, and no backup process exists. Is this dedication, a systems problem, or both?

- What messages about rest did you learn early in your career?
- What happens to your judgment and patience when you work without recovery?
- Which interruptions are true emergencies, and which are habits?
- How might a team benefit from clear coverage and decision protocols?
- What makes rest difficult to protect even when it is scheduled?
- How does a leader's approach to rest shape what the team believes is expected?
- What does "Rest Should Not Be a Reward" suggest about the way you plan your week?
- What would a sustainable solution look like for the manager in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

DESIGN A RECOVERY BOUNDARY · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Identify one recurring recovery period you can protect. Then map out what it would take to make that boundary realistic.

THE BOUNDARY	WHAT IT REQUIRES	TRUE EXCEPTIONS
When and how long	*People, processes, coverage*	*What justifies interruption*

Discussion: Which part of your plan depends most on other people? What conversation would that require?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Recovery looks different across roles, seasons, and family situations. Avoid comparing boundaries; focus on what is realistic for each person.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to schedule their recovery boundary before leaving.

MY RECOVERY BOUNDARY THIS WEEK:

ONE CHANGE THAT WILL HELP ME PROTECT IT:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice the impulse to earn rest by finishing "just one more thing."

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Protect one planned recovery period without adding a work task.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "Rest Should Not Be a Reward" and examine the rule you currently live by.

CLOSING QUESTION

If my team copied my approach to rest, would they be healthier or more exhausted?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 9: BUILDING EVERYDAY RESILIENCE

Next time, we will look at the small, repeatable habits that build resilience. As you move through the week, notice which habits steady you and which ones disappear first under pressure.

SESSION 09 / STAGE FIVE: SUSTAIN

Building Everyday Resilience

FROM THE BOOK

Section Six · Read pages 49–51, "The Small Things, Done Often" and Field Notes.

SESSION PURPOSE

Reframe resilience as the product of ordinary consistency, identify the small habits that support steadiness, and commit to one practice for the coming week.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What if resilience is built less by heroic recovery and more by ordinary consistency?

Opening Reflection

Resilience is often discussed after a crisis, but it is also shaped in the ordinary days before one. Small habits can create room to think, reconnect, notice strain, and respond before pressure becomes a breakdown. A sustainable habit should be small enough to repeat during a busy week. It may be a daily planning pause, a protected transition between work and home, or a weekly conversation that prevents confusion from accumulating. Consistency matters more than drama.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Think of a leader you admire for staying steady under pressure. What small habits do you think help them?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to share practical examples others might borrow.

- What is one small habit that makes your workday better?
- What does a "good morning" look like for you?
- What helps you transition from work to the rest of your life?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A leadership team schedules an annual wellness retreat but has no weekly check-ins, unclear priorities, and an expectation of immediate replies at night. What daily practices would matter more than the retreat?

- Which small habits currently support your steadiness?
- What routine behavior quietly drains your energy?
- In "The Small Things, Done Often," why does frequency matter more than intensity?
- How can leaders make healthy practices visible without imposing them on everyone?
- What does a realistic habit look like during a demanding season?
- How would you know whether a habit is actually helping?
- What team-level practices could make everyone more resilient?
- Which two recurring practices would most improve the team in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE TEN-MINUTE PRACTICE · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one ten-minute practice for the next seven days, such as a planning review, a transition pause, a check-in, or an end-of-day shutdown. Then plan for what might get in the way.

THE PRACTICE	WHEN	LIKELY INTERRUPTION	RESTART PLAN
What you will do	*The time or cue*	*What could derail it*	*How you will begin again*

Discussion: What made your chosen practice realistic? What would make it fail?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage participants to choose something smaller than they think they need. A practice repeated five times is worth more than an ambitious one abandoned after one day.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Invite participants to share their practice aloud with one other person.

MY TEN-MINUTE PRACTICE:

HOW I WILL RESTART AFTER A MISSED DAY:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice small moments when strain begins to accumulate, before it becomes overwhelming.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Repeat one modest resilience practice for seven days.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "The Small Things, Done Often" and evaluate which practices proved sustainable.

CLOSING QUESTION

Which small habit, practiced consistently, would change the way I lead a year from now?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 10: THE MYTH OF BEING CAUGHT UP

Next time, we will explore why leaders chase a state of completion that rarely arrives. As you move through the week, notice how often you think "once I catch up."

SESSION 10 / STAGE FIVE: SUSTAIN

The Myth of Being Caught Up

FROM THE BOOK

Section Seven · Read pages 55–57, "The Myth of Being Caught Up."

SESSION PURPOSE

Challenge the expectation of complete catch-up, replace it with a better measure of daily progress, and practice choosing a healthy stopping point.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What if peace and progress must coexist with unfinished work?

Opening Reflection

Many leaders imagine a future day when the inbox is empty, every problem is solved, and they can finally feel settled. But leadership is ongoing. New needs emerge as old ones are addressed. A permanent state of being caught up may not be a realistic destination. This does not mean deadlines or priorities are unimportant. It means we need a better measure of progress than total completion. Leaders can choose the most meaningful work, communicate tradeoffs, and finish the day knowing some legitimate tasks remain.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Complete this sentence: "Once I catch up, I will finally..." How long have you been saying it?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Expect some laughter of recognition; this one is familiar to almost everyone.

- When was the last time you felt fully caught up?
- What does your inbox or task list look like right now?
- What do you tell yourself at the end of an unfinished day?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A team leader responds to every new request immediately, constantly rearranging priorities. Important long-term work stalls. The leader says, "Once I catch up, I'll focus on strategy."

- What does "caught up" mean in your own mind?
- How does chasing completion affect your ability to prioritize?
- What work deserves attention even when urgent requests continue?
- How can leaders communicate tradeoffs without appearing unresponsive?
- What does a healthy stopping point look like?
- How does a leader's relationship with their task list affect the team's sense of urgency?
- What would change if you measured a good day by priorities met rather than tasks cleared?
- How could the leader in the situation above protect strategic work starting now?

Part Three | Group Exercise

DEFINE ENOUGH FOR TODAY · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Select a typical workday. Using the framework below, define what would make that day meaningful. Then discuss how you would handle new requests without abandoning the day's priorities.

THREE OUTCOMES	ONE THING THAT CAN WAIT	STOPPING CONDITION
What would make today meaningful	*A legitimate task you will defer*	*How you will know the day is done*

Discussion: What is the hardest part of honoring a stopping condition?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Some participants work in roles where interruptions are constant. Help them adapt the framework to what is within their control rather than dismissing it.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to apply the framework to one specific day this week.

THE DAY I WILL USE THIS FRAMEWORK:

MY STOPPING CONDITION:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice the belief that calm must wait until everything is done.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

End one workday based on priorities met rather than an empty inbox.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "The Myth of Being Caught Up" and reconsider how you define progress.

CLOSING QUESTION

What would a successful day look like if I stopped measuring it by what was left undone?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 11: BECOMING THE LEADER YOU CAN SUSTAIN

Next time, we will examine whether our current version of success is one we can maintain. As you move through the week, notice the results that carry a hidden cost.

SESSION 11 / STAGE FIVE: SUSTAIN

Becoming the Leader You Can Sustain

FROM THE BOOK

Section Seven · Read pages 58–60, "The Leader You Can Sustain" and Field Notes.

SESSION PURPOSE

Evaluate whether current definitions of success are sustainable, identify the hidden costs of growth, and adjust one goal so progress can continue over time.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What if your current version of success is too expensive to maintain?

Opening Reflection

Growth can be impressive and still be unsustainable. A leader may reach an ambitious target while neglecting relationships, health, reflection, or the capacity of the team. The achievement is real, but so is its cost. Sustainable growth asks leaders to examine not only what they are building, but how they are building it. It considers the practices that can continue over years, the support required, and the tradeoffs that are no longer acceptable.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Think of a professional achievement you are proud of. What did it cost, and would you pay that cost again?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to think in terms of years, not quarters.

- What does long-term success look like to you?
- Who do you know who has led well for a long time? What do they do differently?
- What part of your current pace could you sustain for ten years?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A high-performing leader earns praise for rapid expansion, but turnover rises, decisions are concentrated at the top, and personal commitments are repeatedly sacrificed. The leader wants to double output next year.

- Which current results are worth preserving, and at what cost?
- How do you distinguish a demanding season from a damaging pattern?
- What indicators reveal whether growth is sustainable?
- Where might ambition need to be matched with better systems or support?
- What would you stop doing to protect long-term effectiveness?
- How does "The Leader You Can Sustain" challenge the way your organization defines success?
- What does your team learn about success by watching how you pursue it?
- What questions should the leader in the situation above answer before expanding?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE SUSTAINABILITY TEST · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Evaluate one major goal against the four measures below. Mark each green, yellow, or red. Then choose one adjustment that would make progress more sustainable without abandoning the goal.

RESULTS	PEOPLE	PERSONAL CAPACITY	REPEATABILITY
Is it producing what matters?	*Is the team growing or depleting?*	*Can I keep this pace?*	*Could this continue for years?*

Discussion: Which measure was most often red across the group? What does that suggest?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Avoid framing ambition as the problem. The goal is to help participants pursue meaningful goals in ways they can maintain.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Ask participants to name one adjustment and when they will make it.

THE GOAL I EVALUATED:

ONE ADJUSTMENT THAT WILL MAKE IT MORE SUSTAINABLE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice successes that require a hidden personal or team cost.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Change one practice that makes a valuable goal unnecessarily expensive.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to "The Leader You Can Sustain" and define a version of success you can live with.

CLOSING QUESTION

Am I building something I will be able to keep leading, or something I will eventually have to escape?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 12: GRACE AS AN ONGOING LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Next time, we will bring the journey together and design a practice to carry forward. As you move through the week, reflect on what has already changed since Session 1.

SESSION 12 / THE PRACTICE CONTINUES

Grace as an Ongoing Leadership Practice

FROM THE BOOK

30-Day Grace Challenge · Read pages 64–79, "The Practice Continues" on page 80, and "In Closing" on page 82.

SESSION PURPOSE

Reflect on the full journey from Recognize through Sustain, identify what has changed, and design a realistic 30-day practice to continue the work.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

How do we make grace a practice rather than an idea we agree with?

Opening Reflection

The journey from Recognize through Sustain is not a one-time transformation. Leaders will encounter new responsibilities, old expectations, difficult conversations, and seasons of pressure. The purpose of this final gathering is not to declare the work finished, but to identify what has changed and what deserves continued attention. The 30-Day Grace Challenge offers a way to translate insight into repeatable behavior. Participants do not need to complete the challenge before this session. Instead, they can use it to design a realistic continuation of the work they began together.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Look back at your notes from Session 1. What would you tell the version of yourself who started this study?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite every participant to share at least one response if they are comfortable.

- What is one thing you are doing differently since this group began?
- Which session has stayed with you the most?
- What surprised you about this group or this conversation?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A participant leaves a leadership study energized but returns to the same calendar, meeting habits, and expectations. Three weeks later, nothing has changed. What would make the learning more likely to last?

- Which idea from the book most challenged your leadership assumptions?
- What have you already changed, even in a small way?
- Which stage of the five-part journey needs your continued attention?
- What support or accountability would help the learning last?
- How have your team or colleagues responded to the changes you have made?
- Which change you have made would be easiest to lose during a busy month?
- What would you tell a leader beginning this study tomorrow?
- What would help the participant in the situation above keep the learning alive?

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Part Three | Group Exercise

YOUR 30-DAY LEADERSHIP PRACTICE · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one practice inspired by the book's 30-Day Grace Challenge. Define each element below, and then write a brief statement beginning: "For the next 30 days, I will practice grace by..."

ACTION	FREQUENCY	LIKELY OBSTACLE	CHECK-IN
What you will do	*How often*	*What will get in the way*	*Who or what will remind you*

Discussion: Read your statement aloud to one other person. What support would make it easier to keep?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Consider inviting the group to schedule a brief follow-up gathering in 30 days to share progress and celebrate what has changed.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Close by inviting each participant to share their 30-day statement if they are comfortable.

FOR THE NEXT 30 DAYS, I WILL PRACTICE GRACE BY:

MY CHECK-IN PARTNER OR REMINDER:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice the moments when an old rule returns under pressure, and treat them as information rather than failure.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Begin your chosen 30-day practice and revisit it weekly.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to the five stages and identify the one you most need right now.

CLOSING QUESTION

What kind of leader will I be thirty days from now if I keep practicing what I have learned?

The Practice CONTINUES

Return to your 30-day commitment, adapt it as you grow, and keep choosing grace over perfection.

Consider gathering again in 30 days to share what has changed and celebrate the progress you have made together.

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