

## PART III

# THE BEING HABITS

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:8–9

How can you Exalt God Only? It seems so easy for other things, people, or circumstances to crowd out your priorities and take over as the object of your worship. When the world so loudly and persistently shouts out its promises, what can you do to better rely on God as your source of security, self-worth, and wisdom and to more consistently choose Him as your audience and authority?

You have heard messages since you were a child about what it takes to be a success—whatever *success* means in a given context. You have been bombarded with commercials and social media messages that define for you the right career, the right kind of car, the right look, power positions, success, and the home of your dreams. What can you possibly do to guard your heart and exalt God when the pull to choose differently is so strong?

As Jesus moved through His season of earthly leadership, He experienced constant pressure and ongoing temptation to stray from the path God had set out for Him. We learn a lot by reading in Scripture what Jesus did to stay on track with His mission. We find five key *Being Habits* that countered the negative forces in His life; habits that we ourselves can adopt.



You'll notice that the central habit is accepting and abiding in God's love. The other four habits—experiencing solitude, practicing prayer, knowing and applying Scripture, and maintaining supportive relationships—are all ways to help you accept and abide in God's unconditional love.

Adopting these habits is essential for those of us who seek to follow Jesus as our role model for leadership. He led with these five habits—and if we want to lead like Jesus, we will too.

Why are these habits essential?

Practicing the Being Habits gives you peace. If peace sounds like a strange characteristic for a leader, think about how Jesus, the Prince of Peace, exhibited it throughout His ministry. Peace is an attractive trait in a leader, and many leaders rise to power on their promises of peace. Jesus knew peace in His Father, and He lived out peace even when everything around Him seemed in conflict or chaos. When people sense a leader's solid self-control, they have greater faith in what he or she is doing.

As Rick Warren observed in *The Purpose Driven Life*, “Your character is essentially the sum of your habits.”<sup>1</sup> So if we want to develop a character like Jesus', we have to look carefully at His habits. And if we want to become more like Jesus, there is only one way: choose to set aside time to be with God.

You may spend this time in solitude, prayer, or the study of Scripture, but the

focus of your time with God is to nourish, strengthen, and grow your relationship with Him. Your time with God will help you get to know Him better and to understand more fully His love for you. Your choice to be in close relationship with God is the one choice that both transforms you and consequently affects everyone around you.

Furthermore, the truth is that you can't keep your heart in its right place by yourself. The One who created you for His great purpose, who loves you more than anyone else does, who knew your last day before your first day began, is the One who calls you to be with Him. It is in being with Him that you become more the person God created you to be: you become more like Jesus.

## **THE HABIT OF ACCEPTING AND ABIDING IN GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**

We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

1 John 4:16

It is hard to imagine that the God of the universe actually seeks a love relationship with you and me. It is hard to imagine because we know ourselves all too well. We know what we are capable of: we know we can be prideful, fearful, mean-spirited, and worse. And we understand conditional relationships, but this powerful love with no strings attached is hard to comprehend. Ephesians 3:17–19 says:

Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (NLT)

What a promise! Your relationship with Jesus is built on the truth that we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). When you choose to set aside time to be with God, you will come to know Him better, the foundation of your relationship with Him will grow stronger, and you can come to more fully accept

and more completely abide in His unconditional love.

There are not, however, four or five easy steps to accepting and abiding in God's love. This habit has nothing to do with how many times you attend church in a month, how often you pray each day, how much money you give to missions, or how many business deals you complete in a week. This habit has nothing to do with your success as a parent, pastor, or business leader. God's love is a gift. Accepting and abiding in His love requires the foundational belief that His love for you is possible. Believing that it is possible for God to love you will lead you to Him—and He enables us to believe He loves us by His Son's death on the cross and His Holy Spirit's work in our hearts.

## **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

Think of a time when you felt loved by God. What were the circumstances? Were you alone with God, in a group, listening to music, reading Scripture, seeing your child walk for the first time, opening your new business, or watching a sunrise?

What steps could you take to feel His love now? One step is simply to ask your heavenly Father to reveal His love to you.

Love draws us into relationships. In fact, you and I are most often drawn to people who love us, especially those who love us not because of what we do for them, but because of who we are. Maybe you have experienced a child or grandchild running to meet you with open arms. There is tremendous joy in the open arms of a child who loves you.

Phyllis recently had an experience in a fast-food restaurant that reminded her of what it is to love without conditions. She was walking toward the drink machine and saw a little girl of about three waiting while her dad filled their cups. The girl saw Phyllis and ran to her, smiling, and Phyllis smiled back. The girl's dad walked over and explained that his daughter had never run up to a stranger that way before. Phyllis said she must look like someone the girl knows. The little girl walked away with her dad but then turned and ran back to Phyllis, this time wrapping her arms around Phyllis's legs. Surprised, her dad came back

and apologized, saying he had no idea what would make the girl behave like this. He picked her up and carried her off. Phyllis felt blessed to be the proxy for whomever the little girl loved so much. The experience felt like a gift to her after a very long day. She chose to believe God sent a little child to remind her of His love for her.

Perhaps the greatest earthly picture of unconditional love is a parent's love for a child. At our seminars, when we ask parents to raise their hands if they love their kids, all the hands go up. When we ask how many of them love their kids only if they're successful, all the hands go down. You love your kids unconditionally, right? But some human relationships have taught us about conditional love and left us broken and wounded. This experience can color our relationship with our heavenly Father.

God's love, however, is not like any other love. Read the following promises of God and personalize them by inserting your name in the blank.

- \_\_\_\_\_, I know you by name.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I have loved you with an everlasting love.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I gave My life for you.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I have great plans for you.
- \_\_\_\_\_, nothing can separate you from My love.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I will wipe away every tear from your eyes.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ask and you will receive.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I want you to have life and have it to the full.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I take great delight in you.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I am with you wherever you go.
- \_\_\_\_\_, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

We live in a world that fuels pride and fear. Through fads, fashion, and societal pressure to acquire more, we are lured into believing we can secure for ourselves a sense of meaning and safety. In absolute contrast to these temporary, always-at-risk places to put our trust are the unconditional love and never-failing promises of God. Only in relationship with God can we find and be assured of a never-ending supply of what we need to live and lead like Jesus.

Knowing God's love for you offers assurance of whose you are and who you are. You are God's—His chosen, who is beloved, forgiven, righteous, and more. Accepting and abiding in God's love means recognizing that every gift you have

is a gift from God. No pride can exist in the face of such grace and generosity, and no fear can grab you from the safety of His unconditional love.

If God's love for you were based on your performance—on how well you lived up to His standards of righteousness—you would never be free of anxiety. The alternative is to accept God's unconditional love for you: admit that you can't earn enough, achieve enough, or control enough to get any more love from Him. In Jesus you already have access to all the love you need and infinitely more. That truth is so powerful. Once you believe that you are completely and unconditionally loved by God, you won't be misled by earthly things that offer love, peace, safety, and security.

Accepting and abiding in God's love, though, is not a onetime decision. It is a habit to be practiced, day by day, hour by hour, even minute by minute. When the world tells you that you are not enough, when fear paralyzes you because failure seems imminent and inevitable, the habit of accepting and abiding in God's love will help you remember that you are unconditionally loved. Soak in those scriptures that remind you of God's love, listen to music that reinforces God's love, and spend time with people who share God's love with you. Whatever it takes to anchor that understanding in your heart, do it.

You will be able to lead like Jesus only if you have received the gift of God's love. His love for us is the foundation of our Jesus-like leadership. We cannot give to others love, peace, hope, or security if we ourselves have not received it first.

You might be thinking, *Why are you talking about accepting and abiding in God's unconditional love in a book on leadership?* Good question. The answer is this: God's love will change you and, by extension, change your leadership. You will see leadership differently: it becomes less about power and control and more about the stewardship of the people you touch and of the work God has given you to do. You will see people differently, too: rather than seeing them as a means to accomplish the results you want, you realize that God has the same love for them that He has for you. Work becomes an act of worship and your workplace an outpost of God's kingdom. You are no longer threatened by feedback; you no longer lead out of fear or cause others to be fearful of you. Accepting and abiding in God's unconditional love changes you and lays the foundation for the four other Being Habits that will help you lead like Jesus.

## **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

At the beginning of this chapter, we said it is hard to imagine that God could love us unconditionally because we know ourselves. Pause for just a few minutes, put your doubts aside, and imagine fully embracing the truth that you are unconditionally loved by Almighty God. Accept that you can't earn that kind of love, you don't deserve it, and you can't add to it or lose it. What in your life would you be doing differently if you lived with absolute confidence in God's love for you?

Now think of a time when, beyond a shadow of doubt, you experienced God's unconditional love for you so personally and specifically that only He and you knew the moment's true significance. How did you feel at the time? How do you feel now as you think back on that moment? What do you want to say to God?



## THE HABIT OF EXPERIENCING SOLITUDE

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1:35

Of the habits we are going to discuss, solitude is by far the most elusive in our modern world of noise, busyness, and 24/7 communications. Solitude is truly countercultural and therefore a challenging behavior to adopt. Furthermore, solitude draws us into the very place so many of our activities seem designed to help us escape: being truly alone with God and without an agenda. It is a rare and often unsettling feeling to stop doing and just *be*. Yet as strange as it feels to actively seek opportunities to “cease striving” (Psalm 46:10 NASB), the result of doing so consistently can be life changing. We can find clarity in the silence.

Let’s define solitude as being completely alone with God, away from all human contact, for an extended period of time. Solitude is stepping out the back door of your noisy life of to-do lists and demanding relationships and breathing in some fresh air. Solitude is being refreshed and restored by the natural rhythms of life that God Himself established. And solitude is taking time to listen for the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12 KJV) by which God speaks to your soul and tells you that you are His beloved. Sometimes, doing nothing is the best thing you can do for your people and for yourself.

Jesus modeled solitude as an integral strategic component of His leadership. Consider the following:

- When preparing for the tests of leadership and public ministry, Jesus spent forty days alone in the desert (Matthew 4:1–11).

- Before Jesus chose His twelve apostles from among His followers, He spent the entire night alone in the desert hills (Luke 6:12–13).
- When Jesus received the news of the death of John the Baptist, He withdrew in a boat to a solitary place (Matthew 14:13).
- After the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, Jesus went up in the hills by Himself (Matthew 14:23).

When He was preparing to lead, needing to make important decisions, grieving, and dealing with praise and recognition, Jesus modeled for us the value of spending time alone to stay on track with God.

Spending daily time with God in solitude enables you to make the difficult choices of leadership. Jesus used the solitude of the early morning hours so that He could receive the Father's guidance for His ministry to determine the best use of His time. In Mark 1:32–38, we read:

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

Did you notice these words? “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” This action strengthened Jesus' resolve to spend His precious time doing the primary work for which He had come—preaching the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God—rather than doing the good and popular things of healing and driving out demons. Imagine Jesus' intense compassion for the sick and the demon-possessed people He would have to leave. Imagine the strong temptation to stay and use His healing powers to the delight of all and to bring comfort to His heart, so burdened as it was for lost and suffering humanity.

We believe that Jesus was able to resist doing merely good work and stay

focused on His God-given mission because of the time He spent alone with His heavenly Father. In solitude and prayer, away from the hopes and hurts of those who looked to Him with high expectations, Jesus received guidance and strength from God.

## **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

When was the last time you intentionally spent a significant amount of time with God in solitude—and that means without a to-do list or prayer list? When was the last time you sat quietly in God’s presence and listened for His “still small voice”? If you can’t remember, consider that a clue as to why your life and leadership may seem stuck and unsatisfying. If you can remember and it was more than a week ago, you need to spend time alone with God in the immediate future.

In fact, take a few minutes to be alone with God right now. Put your hands on your knees, palms down. Think of the concerns you have at this moment. When a concern comes to mind, imagine laying it at the foot of the cross. When no more concerns come to mind, turn your hands palms up in a posture of receiving what God wants to give you. Contemplate some aspect of His character, such as His mercy, His love, His grace, or His power. Listen for His voice. Recite Psalm 46:10 in this way:

Be still, and know that I am God.

Be still, and know.

Be still.

Be.

## THE HABIT OF PRACTICING PRAYER

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Luke 11:1

Solitude may be the most elusive of the five Being Habits for us to develop, but prayer is the habit that requires the most unlearning and revising of old patterns and ways. So maybe it is no real surprise that, of all the things the disciples could have asked Jesus to teach them, their only request recorded in Scripture is “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). The disciples saw the power that came when Jesus prayed, and they longed for their prayers to yield the same kind of results. But—as the disciples needed to learn—prayer is not a technique; it is simply a conversation with God.

Prayer is also an essential act of the will that demonstrates whether we are really serious about living and leading like Jesus. Without prayer, we will never be able to either connect our plans and leadership efforts to God’s plan for His kingdom or engage the spiritual resources that Jesus promised when He sent His Holy Spirit. Seeking God’s will through prayer, waiting in faith for an answer, obeying His instruction when it comes, and being at peace with the outcome will make your leadership a lot like Jesus’.

The power of prayer in one’s life truly is immeasurable. Oswald Chambers wrote, “If you will swing the door of your life fully open and pray to your Father who is in the secret place, every public thing in your life will be marked with the lasting imprint of the presence of God.”<sup>1</sup> We will see the public results of a life

spent in prayer as we consider the example Jesus gave us to follow.

## JESUS' PRAYER IN GETHSEMANE

Nowhere in the Bible is found a more powerful model of praying like Jesus than in the dark hours in Gethsemane the night He was betrayed. This was a time of almost unbearable pressure and stress:

Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:36–39)

Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is an excellent example for leaders. Let's look at four instructive aspects.

1. *Where did Jesus pray and why?* He went off by Himself for prayer. Alone with God, Jesus could freely pour out His heart to the Father, knowing the Father understands the broken language of sighs and groans.
2. *What was Jesus' posture in prayer?* Jesus fell on His face before His Father, indicating His agony, extreme sorrow, and humility. At other times Jesus prayed kneeling or looking up to heaven with His eyes open. The posture of the heart is more important than the posture of the body, but prostrating our physical selves before God helps our heart posture.
3. *What did Jesus ask in prayer?* Jesus asked, "If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me" (v. 39). He was asking if He could avoid the suffering of the cross. But notice the way Jesus couched His request: "If it is possible." He left the decision to the Father when He said, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (v. 39). Although Jesus was keenly aware of the bitter suffering He was to undergo, He freely subjugated His desire to the Father. He based His own willingness upon the Father's will.
4. *What was the answer to Jesus' prayer?* God's answer was that His will—

the will of the Father—would be done. The cup of suffering on the cross did not pass from Jesus, for He had presented that petition with the willingness to defer to His Father’s will. God answered Jesus’ prayer and then fortified Him for the mission He had come to fulfill: “An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him” (Luke 22:43).

As a leader, doing the right thing for the right reasons might require you to drink a bitter cup of ridicule, rejection, or anger. Your human tendency will be to try to avoid that pain. Leading like Jesus will call you to lean in closer to hear from Him how you are to proceed in faith. He will fortify you, enabling you to trust Him to provide you with the courage you need to do the right thing and finish the task.

## **THE POWER OF PREEMPTIVE PRAYER**

When we want to lead like Jesus, prayer becomes our first response, not our last resort. Preemptive prayer is our most powerful, most immediately accessible, most useful resource for responding to the moment-to-moment challenges of life.

Phil’s poem shows the possibilities of prayer.

### **Just Suppose**

*Just suppose*, when I pray, there really is someone listening who cares about me and wants to know what is on my mind.

*Just suppose*, when I pray, it changes me and my view of how the universe operates and who is involved.

*Just suppose* I put my doubts aside for a minute and consider the possibility that someone who knew me before I was born loves me, warts and all, without condition or reservation, no matter how badly I have behaved in the past.

*Just suppose* a prayer was my first response instead of my last resort when facing a new challenge or an old temptation.

*Just suppose* I lived each day knowing that there is an inexhaustible supply of love for me to pass along to others.

*Just suppose.*

We believe all of these *just suppose* things are true. *Just suppose* they are true for you too.

## THE ACTS METHOD OF PRAYER

People often ask us how to pray. Again, prayer is not a technique; it is essentially a conversation with God. We all need to develop our own style of conversing with the Father. For those of you who would like a framework to get started, we suggest the ACTS approach. The simple acronym ACTS can help you remember four basic parts of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to helping many beginners in prayer, this method has also served as a compass for weather-beaten veterans. Try it for a few days.

***Adoration.*** All prayer should begin with adoration. Tell the Lord that you love Him and appreciate Him for who He is: “Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all” (1 Chronicles 29:11).

***Confession.*** When we come into the presence of a holy God, we recognize our sins: we all fall short of God’s glory. Therefore, our first response to adoring God is confession: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

***Thanksgiving.*** Thanksgiving is our heartfelt expression of gratitude to God for all He has done in creation and in redemption. Thank God specifically for all that He has done for you. As the old hymn says, “Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings; see what God has done.”<sup>2</sup> What if tomorrow you only had the things that you thanked God for today? Toothpaste, air, water, clothes, family, job—you name it. Take note of the scripture: “Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:19–20).

***Supplication.*** Finally, we get to the part of prayer where most of us start and too often never get past. Supplication is asking for what we need. Start by praying about other people’s needs and then ask God to meet your own needs. It’s okay to have a big wish list. According to God’s Word, we can ask with confidence: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

One of the most revealing questions we can ask a leadership candidate is, “How is your prayer life?” The answer will speak volumes about where and how the leader might lead.

Here’s a question for you: How is *your* prayer life?



## **THE HABIT OF KNOWING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURE**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

It is through Scripture that you come to know God and His ways. In the pages of His Word, God invites you to know Him and experience His love. In Scripture you discover that God loves you, He has great plans for you, and He created you perfectly to accomplish a specific purpose. The study of Scripture equips us to fulfill God’s plan for us. Scripture also instructs us how to treat one another, how to love as we have been loved, and, yes, how to lead like Jesus.

Consider now these five practical ways you can cultivate the habit of knowing and applying Scripture: hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating. We pray that today you will begin the adventure of knowing God through Scripture.

### **HEAR THE WORD**

One way to receive the Word is to hear it from someone else. Even a child or a person who cannot read can hear the Bible. Jesus said, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:23). Hearing with our ears leads to hearing with our hearts. Later, Paul wrote this: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17). Among the many opportunities to hear God’s Word today are audiobooks and a variety of

social media.

The parable of the sower, found in Matthew 13:3–23, lists four kinds of hearers of the Word. The apathetic hearer hears the Word but does not understand it (v. 19); the superficial hearer receives the Word temporarily but does not let it take root in the heart (vv. 20–21); and the preoccupied hearer receives the Word but lets the worries of this world and the desire for other things choke it out (v. 22). The reproducing hearer, though, receives the Word, understands it, and bears fruit (v. 23). Which kind of hearer are you?

## **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

One way to apply what you hear is to ask yourself the following questions after you hear each Scripture passage and jot down your thoughts.

- What did God say to me?
- How does my life measure up to God’s standards and instructions?
- What actions will I take to align my life with His message?
- What truth in the passage do I need to study further?
- What truth can I share with another person today?

## **READ THE WORD**

The second way you learn God’s Word is to read it: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near” (Revelation 1:3). Be sure to allow time for reflection after you read.

Choose a short passage of Scripture. If you read too much at once, you may find it challenging to reflect on its meaning or allow God to speak directly to you and your situation. Start with a passage of manageable length, like these verses from Psalm 103: “Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (vv. 1–2).

Balance your reading of the Word. Be sure that your reading of God's Word includes both the Old Testament and the New Testament. God will speak to you through every word in His Word. Jesus said, " 'Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened [the disciples'] minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44–45). The Bible contains many passages that point to Jesus. You will want to read about Him in the sections mentioned in Luke as well as throughout the Bible. Apply the Word to your life each day. Ask God to show you what His Word means to you and for your life. Jesus instructed, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15).

Every time you apply the Word of God to your life, you grow closer to Him. Every time you fail to apply it, you leave the Word, like scattered seed, beside the road, where Satan can steal it. When you read God's Word, respond to it with prayer and obedience. Scripture teaches us that obedience is always about our love for our heavenly Father.

## **STUDY THE WORD**

Studying the Word means learning more about its meaning and application. Knowing God's Word more deeply will enable us to follow this New Testament example: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

With study, you begin to handle God's Word more effectively. Bible study is an in-depth look into the Scriptures: the goal is to learn more than you would during a simple overview or in a devotional reading. Study involves, for instance, comparing one Bible passage to another or searching through the Scriptures for the answer to a question. Bible study often includes gaining additional information through commentaries and study helps.

## **MEMORIZE THE WORD**

When you commit God's Word to memory, it lives in you, you live in it, and God's promises become your possessions. The psalmist recognized this truth: "How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your

word. . . . I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:9, 11).

In the account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11), Jesus set the example for us. He used Scripture as the sword of the Spirit against Satan, even when Satan misused Scripture to fuel the temptation. In addition to helping you gain victory over sin, memorized Scripture helps you answer people who have questions about your faith. Being able to recite Scripture verses by heart also helps you to reflect on them and gives you direction for your daily life at any moment. Finally, memorizing scriptures enables us to obey this God-given command: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).

When Phyllis was eight years old, a group came to her school and offered students a chance to go to a two-week summer camp—with swimming, tennis, campfires, and s’mores—and it wouldn’t cost them a cent. The only cost was memorizing three hundred Scripture verses.

Phyllis was up to the challenge. Her parents agreed it was a good commitment to make and offered to help. So Phyllis got up at 6:00 a.m. each day, memorized a passage, and recited it to her father, who was pastor of a church. Every morning he would pray, *Lord, help Phyllis remember these scriptures. Plant them as seeds in her heart.* At the end of each week, Phyllis would recite all the week’s verses for her father, who would sign a form to verify that she had memorized them.

By the end of the school year, Phyllis had memorized all three hundred verses and earned two weeks at camp. But she had not considered two key things: First, she had never been away from home. And second, no one else at her school had memorized the verses, so she wouldn’t know anyone at camp.

On Wednesday of the first week, Phyllis called home in tears and begged her mother to come get her. Her mother persuaded her to stay until Saturday. When Phyllis got home, she was disappointed that she had worked so hard and not enjoyed the reward.

Phyllis didn’t yet know that her real reward was learning—among many other things—that she never had to be afraid. In Isaiah 43:1 she had learned that God knew her by name, and she was His. She had learned in Jeremiah 33:3 that God would answer her and tell her “great and unsearchable things.” In Ephesians 3:20 she had learned that God would do “immeasurably more” than anything she could “ask or imagine”—and she had a big imagination.

Eight-year-old Phyllis had no idea how God would use those seeds she had worked so hard to plant in her heart. Many years later, though, when her husband of twenty-two years collapsed in front of her, Phyllis had in her mind the words of Jeremiah 29:11, a verse she had memorized as a child: “I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Sitting with her daughter in a waiting room, Phyllis looked up as the doctor came to the doorway and said, “I am sorry. Sometimes the first sign of heart disease is fatal.”

Immediately Phyllis heard, “I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” *This doesn’t feel like hope and a future*, she thought. Then, almost like a movie playing in her mind, Proverbs 3:5–6 appeared: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” She said out loud, “It is about trusting You.”

Phyllis never could have imagined that a little more than three years later, she would marry again. Throughout the next nineteen years, she depended on Scripture to teach her about loving unconditionally, blending a family, and serving them. Then the news came that her second husband had lung cancer. How could that be? He was not a smoker, and he looked healthy. Phyllis leaned on God for the next several months as her big, strong husband went from walking alone to walking with a cane, using a walker, needing a wheelchair, and then resting in a hospice bed. Every day she reminded herself of what she knew about God from Scripture: *He loves me; He has great plans for me; He will never leave me*. When her husband was released to his new life, Phyllis knew she could still trust God with all her heart. It is amazing that, beginning when she was eight years old, God used His Word to prepare Phyllis for every part of her journey. Her father’s prayer was answered: those verses planted in her heart were seeds of truth that took deep root in her life.

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

1. Choose a few verses that have touched you.
2. Write each verse on a note card and place it in a prominent place so

that you can review it while you do other tasks.

3. Turn it over in your mind; savor every word.
4. Review it often for as long as it takes you to store the message in your mind. Then move to another verse.

## MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORD

Another way you live in the Word and the Word lives in you is to think about it or meditate on its truth. As the psalmist said, “Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:1–2).

You meditate on God's Word when you focus on a specific verse of Scripture in order to more fully understand all that it says. Select a key verse in a passage you have just read. Ask the Holy Spirit for His revelation as you meditate.

Here are some practical ways to meditate on God's Word:

1. Read the verses before and after your selected verse to establish the theme and setting. That information will aid you in interpretation. Write a summary of the passage.
2. Write the verse(s) in your own words. Read your paraphrase aloud.
3. Now read the verse over and over again, emphasizing a different word each time. For example, in the verse “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13 NKJV), first emphasize the word *I*, then the word *can*, and so on. This exercise helps each word yield its full impact.
4. State the opposite meaning of the verse. For instance: “I can't do anything if Christ does not strengthen me.” What impact does the verse have on you now?
5. Write at least two important words from the verse. To relate the Scripture to your current life situation, ask a few of these questions about the two words: What? Why? Where? Who? How? For example: “What can I do?” All things. “Why?” Because Christ strengthens me. “Who strengthens me?” Christ.

6. Personalize the verse. Ask the Holy Spirit to use its truth to speak to a need, a challenge, an opportunity, or a failure in your life. Then determine what you will do in response to this verse as it relates to your life. Be specific.
7. Repeat the verse back to God in your prayer time with Him. Put your own name or situation in the verse.
8. Refer to other passages that emphasize the truth of the verse. List any thoughts you might not understand or ideas you might have difficulty applying in your life. Seek out instruction or help in these areas.
9. Write out a way you can use the verse to help another person—and then do so.

## **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

Are you actively seeking God's guidance by spending time reading the Bible? What is He currently saying to you?

## THE HABIT OF MAINTAINING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Among the twelve men He called out to be His apostles, Jesus had a small group of three—Peter, James, and John—with whom He seemed to have a particularly close relationship. He took these three with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration, where He revealed to them, in confidence, the true nature of His being (Matthew 17:1–9). These same three men were present when Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of a synagogue leader (Mark 5:21–43). And the most poignant episode involving this circle of friends occurred on the night Jesus was arrested and began His final journey to the cross: Jesus asked them to follow deeper into the garden with Him (Matthew 26:37–38). But Peter, James, and John—invited along to support their Friend in His agonizing anticipation of the cross—fell asleep.

As this last scene so powerfully illustrates, leadership can be a lonely business filled with great amounts of soul-draining human interaction but little soul-filling intimacy. Leaders need safe-harbor relationships in which they can lay down all the armor and weapons they need to face the world and can relax in confidential and unguarded conversation. Without these safe relationships, leaders become vulnerable to two debilitating frames of mind and spirit: the victim and the martyr. Allowed to blossom into either resentment or a justification for seeking EGO-soothing instant gratification, these twin demons have been the downfall of many a leader in every walk of life.

Jesus emphasized the importance of communion of spirit when He prayed



for His followers to attain the joy that He Himself had in His unity and fellowship with His Father. In John 15:9, 12–15 Jesus told His disciples:

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. . . . My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

When we rely on our own perspectives of how we are doing, we are bound to slip into convenient rationalizations or unknowingly encounter blind spots, both of which can quickly undermine our integrity as well as the trust of those we lead.

## **TRUTH TELLERS**

We all need trusted truth tellers—preferably people not directly affected by our leadership—who can help us keep on course. If you can’t name any active truth tellers in your life, or if you have avoided or undervalued the ones you have, it’s time to make a change. Truth tellers are probably your greatest resource for growth. Ken’s father used to tell him, “I learned in the navy that if you don’t hear from your people about any problems, watch out, because you are about to go over the side. You have mutiny on your hands, because the people around you don’t feel valued—and therefore they have cut you off from the truth.”

Too often a self-serving leader will silence valuable feedback by killing the messenger. Eventually the leader is fired. Although people were available who could have given the leader helpful information, the leader cut off the workers’ opportunity to grow and to communicate ideas that would have improved the leader’s own skills.

Feedback is a gift. If somebody gives you a gift, what do you say? “Thank you!” Then ask more questions in order to understand what is being said and why: “What made you think that?” “How long has this been an issue?” “Don’t name names, but can you tell me more about how your coworkers are feeling?” “Whom do you suggest I talk to about this situation?” And maybe even “Why

hasn't anyone approached me before now?"

Truth tellers are willing to be honest if they know you are going to listen. Your listening doesn't mean you have to do everything they say, but they want to know you have heard them. If you let yourself be a bit vulnerable in the process, the give-and-take can be rich and valuable.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10)

We encourage you to contact people you know and form an accountability relationship or group that meets for regular times of truth telling.

Being open to feedback from other people is not the only way to grow; being willing to disclose our own vulnerabilities, flaws, and sins to other people is another. All of us fall short of being who God wants us to be; we fall short of being who *we* want to be! So don't be afraid to share specific points of vulnerability. Being open is one of the most powerful ways to build relationships with the people you're leading. They know you're not perfect, so don't act as if you are. More times than not, they know your imperfections long before you reveal them. Colleen Barrett, president emerita of Southwest Airlines, puts it this way: "People admire your skills, but they love your vulnerability."<sup>1</sup>

However, disclosing your vulnerabilities doesn't mean divulging all your inner thoughts. Rather, you want to share only task-relevant information or struggles you are working on as a leader. If a truth teller says you're not a good listener, it's wonderful to go in front of the team and say something like this: "Bill was kind enough to share feedback with me about my listening. I didn't realize that when you say things to me, I jump right into my own agenda. But now I know—and I would like to improve. The only way I can listen better is if you help me." As Proverbs 27:6 says: "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses."

## SMALL-GROUP FELLOWSHIP

In *Leadership by the Book*—which Ken and Phil wrote with Bill Hybels—one of the central characters explains how he got into trouble after a successful start at becoming a leader: "When I boil it down, it was a combination of ego and self-

imposed isolation.”<sup>2</sup>

As we commit to becoming more like Jesus in the way we lead, it is vital to note how He combated the loneliness and isolation that often come with leadership. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus had all kinds of relationships with all kinds of people. Hundreds, even thousands, of people flocked to Him everywhere He went. Yet He chose twelve men as disciples to entrust with His mission and, from those, three inner-circle confidants—Peter, James, and John—to lean on in crucial times.

If you are to grow in your daily walk as a Jesus-like leader, you need similar supportive relationships. The temptations and challenges to be an EGO-driven, fear-motivated leader are going to continue and will probably intensify. The value of having safe-harbor relationships of support and accountability cannot be overemphasized. As one New Testament writer put it, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together . . . but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:24–25).

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

Name the special people in your life who love you enough to tell you what you need to hear. What are you doing to nurture and strengthen those special relationships? Who in your life needs you to hold them accountable? Do you love them enough to tell them what they need to know? Listed below are sample questions for inner-circle accountability conversations:

- Where do you see or sense God at work in your life right now?
- What truth, command, or redirection has God been making clear to you lately?
- What is something you need to start doing? What’s holding you back?
- What is something you need to stop doing? What’s keeping you from stopping?
- What gaps—if any—exist between your saying and your doing?

## WHAT DECISION WILL YOU MAKE?

The world needs to see God, and the only way some people will see Him is if they see God through us. That's why each of us has a decision to make: Will we choose to lead like everyone else, or will we choose to lead like Jesus by practicing the five Being Habits?

When former professional football player Rosey Grier spoke at a Lead Like Jesus event, he shared a compelling personal example of the importance of being prepared to lead like Jesus:

You know what I wanted to do as a football player? I wanted to carry the ball. But the Giants wouldn't let me because I was too big. I played in five world championship games with the Giants and then got traded to the LA Rams. They wouldn't let me carry the football either—they put me on defense.

One day we're playing the Green Bay Packers. They drove from their five-yard line down to our five-yard line, so we called a time-out. Our guys huddled up and said, "They're going to score on us. Let's run a blitz."

Now, they didn't know we were going to run a blitz. So the quarterback struts out and says, "Everybody go down!" Then Deacon Jones, Merlin Olsen, Lamar Lundy, and I start coming after him. While he was fading back with the ball, he closed his eyes. Deacon, Merlin, and Lamar jumped on him, and there was no place left for me to jump on him.

Then the football popped up, just like that. I'm looking up at that football. All my life I've been wanting to carry that football. I heard a voice in my head say, "You're supposed to yell out, 'Ball!'" But the week before, I had yelled out, "Ball!" and Merlin got the football and started running down the sideline. I was so mad! I caught up to him and said, "Say, Merlin, let me carry the football some." He said, "No, man, I'm carrying it all the way!" So I didn't block for him—and he didn't make it either.

So I'm looking at that football, and I have to make a decision. I don't want to say, "Ball!" because I want to run ninety-five yards for a touchdown myself. But as I'm standing there, with my hands up in the

air, that old voice in my head says, “Can you *catch*?”

You know what? I had never practiced catching. When I had an opportunity to run ninety-five yards for a touchdown, I wasn’t able to do it because I was not prepared.

Today is the day to make your decision if you haven’t already. Will you decide to lead like Jesus? If so, will you choose to get prepared to run the leadership race by putting into practice the five Being Habits that Jesus modeled?

## **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

How ready are you to lead like Jesus today? Answering the following questions about the Being Habits will give you an idea.

- Accepting and Abiding in God’s Unconditional Love—Do you sense God’s unconditional love for you today? If not, why do you think that’s the case?
- Solitude—Are you ready to be alone with Jesus on a regular basis? If so, what’s your plan for being consistent? If not, why do you think you’re hesitant?
- Prayer—What will you do to strengthen your prayer life and communicate with Jesus on a regular basis?
- Bible Study—Are you actively seeking the Lord’s guidance by spending time studying His Holy Word? If not, why not?
- Supportive Relationships—Do you have a small group of like-minded friends with whom you can be open and vulnerable? If not, where might you look? If so, what do you do to nurture and strengthen those relationships?