

**a Devotional and  
Small Group Study Guide**

by Dr. Victor D. Pentz

**TAKE THIS JOB**  
*and love it!*



PEACHTREE  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

# **Take This Job and Love It!**

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Dear Friends:

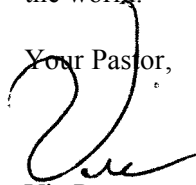
A March article in *The New York Times* reports that there are more than 1,200 Christian groups devoted to workplace ministry in North America, almost double the number of groups that existed five years ago. After a long period of people saying religion was a private matter, a lot of people are now trying to integrate these two parts of their lives, said David W. Miller, who runs the Center for Faith and Culture at Yale. Clearly, we are all struggling to integrate faith and work in ways that make life more meaningful.

I cannot remember a time when we Christians had more opportunity to make a difference in the workplace. But if we maintain a solid double yellow line down the middle of our lives, dividing faith from work, we will never fulfill our calling as Christians - to make a real difference for Christ in the world.

I hope that this Devotional and Small Group Study Guide will assist you in your efforts to integrate faith and work. Each week there are five days of devotionals, followed by a small group exercise so that you can use it individually and/or with family or colleagues. I highly recommend the DVD of the video clips referenced in the small group exercises which is available at no cost to you in the bookstore or at the reception desks in the Welcome Center or on the 2nd floor.

May God bless you with a powerful sense of vocation, a calling to the world.

Your Pastor,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vic Pentz', written over the printed name.

Vic Pentz  
April 2004

## **Week One**

### **Church on Sunday, Work on Monday**

*If we are to live unto God at any time or in any place, we are to live unto Him at all times and in all places. If we are to use anything as the gift of God, we are to use everything as His gift.*

**- William Law**

### **Day One**

#### **The Partnership**

*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. I Corinthians 3:8-9*

When the Pharisees criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, His response was “My Father is working and I am working still...” The most godlike thing you and I can do is get up in the morning and go to work. Whether your work is in the executive suite of a Fortune 500 company or on the seat of a backhoe digging ditches, or in the home rearing children, your work has value because you are *God's fellow worker*.

A number of years ago I heard Dr. Tony Campolo tell a story about his wife, Peggy who stayed at home to rear their two children while Tony traveled the globe in his work. Peggy said that on the occasions she would travel with Tony and find herself in conversation with some of the most powerful and impressive people in the world, she would sometimes feel intimidated and question her own self worth. Tony's advice was, “Honey, why don't you come up with something you can say when you meet people that will let them know that you value what you're doing and think that it's important.” Not long after, Tony heard a woman ask Peggy in a rather condescending tone, “Well, my dear, and what do

you do?” Peggy quickly replied, “I am nurturing two *homo sapiens* into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might become effective instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia God envisioned from the beginning of time. And what do you do?” The woman quietly replied, “I’m just a lawyer.”

Whether you are a homemaker nurturing *homo sapiens* or an executive nurturing corporate growth, or anything in between, you can be an instrument in God’s transformation of the world by remembering that *you are God’s fellow worker; God’s field, God’s building.*

**Prayer:** Lord, I thank you for the blessing of being in partnership with you. I ask today for you to make me a more effective instrument for the transformation of the world into your Kingdom. Amen

## **Day Two** **Making Partner**

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*  
Genesis 1:26-28

*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.* Genesis 2:15

God’s call to the world of business is grounded in the creation narratives of Genesis. It is here that we find we are made in God’s image and that we have a role to play in the physical world. Our first calling is to **fill** the earth and subdue it, but secondly, we are to **care** for the earth. We are

**masters**, but we are also **caretakers**. It is only in partnership with God that our calling takes on dignity and purpose and that we strike the proper balance between **master** and **caretaker**. Our partnership is beautifully illustrated in Genesis 2:5 – *and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth – Why had God not sent rain? ...there was no man to work the ground*, so God created humans to partner with Him in the Garden, to share in the work of creation.

In the business world, “making partner” is a sign of success, the reward for hard work and diligence. How much greater is it, then, to be in partnership with God?

**Prayer:** Lord, I ask today that you would fill me with a powerful understanding of what it means to be made in your image. May my every act today be a reflection of that image so that the world comes to know you as Creator and Sustainer. Amen

### **Day Three**

#### **If I’m a Partner Why am I So Miserable?**

*Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.* Genesis 3:17-19

In the business world, a limited partnership has two kinds of partners: limited partners, who have little role in management and no personal liability, and general partners, who are responsible for managing the entity and have unlimited personal liability for its debts. In a limited

partnership if things go well, the limited partner can reap vast rewards without the headaches and heartaches that come with management.

Adam and Eve were not satisfied being limited partners with God – they wanted it all, so they tried to stage a takeover. The destructive effects of sin suddenly permeated all aspects of God’s perfect world. The result is a world of lousy management, tyrannical bosses, dishonest merchants, injustice, sweatshops, and exploitation.

The fall affects how we view our work today. We talk about having a “job” or a “career” but rarely do we refer to our work as “vocation,” a calling from God. That puts a solid double yellow line down the middle of our lives that divides our worship life from our work life. Like Adam and Eve, we would rather manage than let God manage. The result is that we wind up under a crushing burden of debt liability. Are you trying to carry that load? Or will you release it to Christ?

**Prayer:** Lord, send me forth to this day with a powerful understanding of what it means to be in partnership with you. Erase the line that would divide my faith from my work so that in everything I do you will be glorified. Amen

## **Day Four Debt Relief**

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24-25*

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he*

*has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Colossians 1:19-23*

Hear the Good News! The death and resurrection of Jesus brought about the redemption of all things. The saving power of Christ not only relieves us of **our** burden of debt, but it extends throughout all of creation, including our workaday lives. Christ's victory on the cross and the empty tomb restores us to our calling and re-establishes the partnership with God. In effect, Christ picks us up and carries us back to the Garden. There's an old song from the Woodstock days of the 60's that says "we've got to get ourselves back to the Garden..." We **can't** get ourselves back, but Christ can take us back.

We are now a redeemed humanity, a new Adam and a new Eve, who can experience joy and partnership with God in our work. We can be hardworking employees, with integrity in our work, people who joyously excel in all we do when we do it all for the glory of God – *if [we] continue in [our] faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.*

**Prayer:** God, I pray today for constant reminders that I do not have to bear the burden of my debt; that you took it onto your shoulders and bore it to Calvary where you redeemed me for your purpose. Let me go forth today with the joy of being free in you. Amen



## Day Five

### He's in Management, I'm in Sales

*I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20*

One night several years ago, I received a call from a young man in my congregation that immediately got my attention. "Vic, I think I'm going to kill myself." I met Scott in my office where he began to unburden himself and talk about his drive, his obsessiveness and how his relationship with his father fueled his ambition to the point that he worked 18 hour days, then all nighters with mega doses of coffee. Still, his business was hanging by a thread. Scott had so identified himself with his business that if it went down the tubes he knew he would go with it. I'll never forget Scott holding out his big athletic hands and saying, "It's like this invisible hand has me by the throat. It's dragging me down, and I can't get loose." Many of us are like Scott, putting our business where God is supposed to be and find ourselves being crushed under the burden.

Every Christmas for as long as I can remember, I have read a scripture from Isaiah that assures me that *the government shall be upon His shoulders*. In business terms, He's in management, I'm in sales. The pressure's off of me because He has allowed me to release it to Him.

Each Sunday we pray "give us this day our daily bread." In that moment we are asking God to carry us through the day, to see to our well being. Why, then do we go to work on Monday and seize the burden once again?

As William Law says, *If we are to live unto God at any time or in any place, we are to live unto Him at all times and in all places*. We cannot maintain a dividing line between

church on Sunday and work on Monday and expect to find joy in our work. We cannot expect to find joy in worship on Sunday or in relationship with God if we refuse to yield to Him a significant part of our lives. Why not exchange that double yellow line for a yield sign?

**Prayer:** Lord, remind me this day and every day to release to you every time and place in my life. Free me from the pressure of performance and let me live each moment of this day seeking to glorify you in all that I do. Amen

### **Small Group Exercise:**

1 – View together the clip from The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. Does Frodo see the task ahead of him as just a job to get done? Or is it a calling? Describe Frodo’s support structure for the task ahead of him. What does it mean to be in fellowship? How can fellowship in Christian community help us transform our work?

2 - David W. Miller, Executive Director of Yale Divinity School Center for Faith and Culture has defined four methods (listed below) through which Christians can integrate their faith and work. Read these and discuss with the group where you would place yourself in one of these quadrants today. Which one(s) represent areas in which you would like to grow? Why?

- EV: Evangelization is the traditional way in which Christians have integrated their faith and work. It might take shape through something like creating Bible studies at work to invite non-Christians to learn of the Good News. Evangelization is motivated by the Great Commission. People who use this method, see work as their mission field.

- ET: Ethics: Has a two fold expression. First, internal ethics within an organization, how do we treat people in our organization? Are they paid fairly? How honest are we when it come to disclosure? Are we operating with integrity internally? Second is external ethics, social ethics. What kind of impact does our work have on the broader culture? Are we selling cigarettes in third world countries? Is our advertising honest? What impact do our practices have on the poor, on the environment?

- EN: Enrichment: highlights spiritual nurture - prayer, meditation, daily devotionals. A monk named Brother

Lawrence provides a shining example of enrichment: *"We can do little things for God," he said. "I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him who has given me grace to work. Afterwards I rise happier than a king."*

- EX: experience: these folks are seeking meaning and purpose in and through their work, so work is not just a way of earning a paycheck but a call to do some essential task in God's plan of the ages. They want to sense their work as a part of God's purpose and kingdom, like the great Bible characters, Moses, Samuel, David and Paul.

## WEEK TWO

### I Will Quit My Job Before I Ever...

*All around us there is a breakdown of values . . . It is not just the . . . overpowering greed that pervades our business life. It is the fact that we are not willing to sacrifice for the ethics and values we profess. For an ethic is not an ethic, and a value not a value without some sacrifice to it. Something given, up, something not taken, something not gained.*

**-Jerome Kohlberg Jr.,**

### Day One Inch by Inch

*The merchant uses dishonest scales; he loves to defraud.*  
Hosea 12:7-8

The news is full these days of executives caught up in scandalous wrong doings. Our first instinct when we read these accounts is to think they must be horrible human beings, that we could never do anything like that. Jim Collins reminds us, however that temptation rarely presents itself in such a bold and brazen way. If you suggested to any of these CEOs 10 years ahead of time, “Hey, let’s cook the books and all get rich,” Collins speculates they would never go along with it. When you are at step A, it feels inconceivable to jump all the way to step Z, if step Z involves something that is a total breach of your values. But if you go from step A to step B, then step B to step C, then step C to step D, then someday, you wake up and discover that you are at step Y. It’s at that point that the move to step Z is so easy.

Paul reminds us in Romans 7 that *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but*

*what I hate I do.* We are slaves to sin and only through God's grace can we hope to be delivered from it.

Where are you today? At Step A? Or are you at Step Y? Or someplace in between? We should make it a regular practice to pray the Lord's prayer every day, not just on Sunday ...  
*deliver us from temptation.*

**Prayer:** Lord, I pray that today you will deliver me from the temptation of taking one more small step toward compromise that will ultimately lead me to turn my back on you. Let your grace flood my life today and deliver me from my slavery to sin. Amen

## **Day Two**

### **The Lure of the Word "We"**

*Such is the destiny of all who forget God; so perishes the hope of the godless. What he trusts in is fragile; what he relies on is a spider's web. He leans on his web, but it gives way; he clings to it, but it does not hold.* Job 8:13-15

C.S. Lewis tells us that: *(The temptation to engage in unethical conduct) will come...in a not very dramatic (way). Over a drink or a cup of coffee, disguised as a triviality and sandwiched between two jokes, from the lips of a man, or a woman, whom you have recently been getting to know rather better and whom you hope to know better still...It will be the hint of something (that violates) the technical rules of fair play...something which the ...ignorant, romantic public would never understand...but something, says your new friend, which "we" and at the word "we" you try not to blush for sheer pleasure...something 'we always do.'* And you will be drawn in, if you are drawn in, not by desire for gain or ease, but simply because at that moment, when the cup was so near your lips, you (could not) bear to be thrust back again into the cold outer world...It may end in a crash,

*a scandal, and (a prison sentence); (or) it may end in millions, a (grand title) and giving the prizes at your old school. But you will be a scoundrel.*

The lure of the word “we” – we so desperately want to belong, to be part of the “in” crowd. And yet that is the most fragile source from which to seek our identity. The Bible tells us we are *made in God’s image*. What could be more powerful than that, to be made in the image of the creator of the universe? Our identity is rooted in and derives its value only from our Creator. Let us rejoice and be glad!

**Prayer:** Lord, let me not put my trust in weak and fragile things, but plant it in the solid rock of your presence. Guide me from the desire to be one of the “in” crowd and lead me to seek my identity in and through you. Amen

### **Day Three Resolution**

*But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. To these four*

*young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. Daniel 1:8-20*

Temptation is subtle and we are so easily lured by the desire to belong. How can we protect ourselves from falling into temptation? Daniel and his friends (you remember, Shadrach, Meshach and Abnego, the men in the fiery furnace) embedded themselves in their relationship with God, praying to Him daily, remembering whose they were by following a routine that reminded them on a daily basis that God had claimed them. They participated in the life and culture of Babylon where they had been taken into captivity, enrolled in the education program and physical exercise – they were able to maintain integrity and resolve the conflict yet sustain good relations with those they worked with.

BUT Daniel and his friends had a set of pre-emptive ethics, a line in the sand beyond which they knew they could not go without be sucked all the way in. They knew that the other side of that line meant separation from God. Even when threatened with torture, they refused to capitulate.

Do you know where your line in the sand is? That point beyond which you will not go, a point at which you will sacrifice your career, advancement, and success rather than your values, rather than your relationship with God? *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

Colossians 2:8



**Prayer:** Lord, show me where to draw that line in the sand beyond which is separation from you. Lead me in developing relationships with my colleagues that have integrity. When conflicts arise, show me the way to resolve them in a manner that honors you. Amen

## **Day Four**

### **Reading the Gauges**

*"As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind. Daniel 2:29-30*

A number of years ago Becky and I struck up a conversation with a man in a Cairo restaurant. When I asked him what kind of work he did, he told me that he trained Egyptian fighter pilots. "What's the most difficult part of your job?" I asked. His reply, "Teaching them to trust the instruments."

More often than not, when we find ourselves on a course to trouble, the instrument panel will be beeping warnings of the dangers ahead. The question is, do we trust the instrument panel? When God gave King Nebuchadnezzar a warning of the perils ahead, the King could not understand the warnings – he had no relationship with God that would allow him to trust what he saw. Daniel, on the other hand, was in constant touch with God. He knew God, trusted God, and anticipated that God was acting for good in his life. Daniel was able to trust the "instrument panel" and warn Nebuchadnezzar that he was headed nose first into the ground.

Relationship – with God and with godly friends provides us with an elaborate set of alarm bells that can help steer us

clear of circumstances that would lead us into compromising positions. Are you a Daniel, maintaining regular, daily contact with God so that you can hear Him when He speaks to you? Do you surround yourself with friends like Daniel, who not only listen to God but are willing to tell you when you are getting ready to do something that is not pleasing to God? *Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.* James 2:23

**Prayer:** Lord, in your Word and presence you have placed before me the ultimate instrument panel for navigating through life. When warnings of danger sound, let me trust the instruments. Surround me with godly friends and lead me into ever deepening relationship with you. Amen

### **Day Five Free at Last!**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Hebrews 12:1-2

An October 2003 article in *Theology Today* warns us that contemporary advertising plays to our baser instincts of pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony. "Freedom from responsibility. It works like this: Advertisers are focusing more and more on the emerging market of 'people who do only what they want to do,' that is, people who yearn to be completely free of all restraint, expectations, and responsibilities...So a socially subversive, pro-impulse, anti-rules and anti-restraint message is casually being built into more and more ad campaigns." Take a look:

“Just do it!” – Nike

“Sometimes, you gotta’ break all the rules.” –Burger King

“Some people embrace the night because rules of the day do not apply.” –Bacardi Black

“Relax. No rules here.” –Neiman Marcus

“Peel off inhibitions. Find your own road.” –Saab

“Living without boundaries.” –Ralph Lauren

“Your world should know no boundaries.” –Merrill Lynch

As Christians, we have a choice: Do we listen to the message of the culture? Or do we fix our eyes on Jesus? *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.* Galatians 5:13-15

**Prayer:** Lord, I want to keep my eyes fixed on you today. Let me experience the joys of serving others and being free in you. Amen

### Small Group Exercise:

1 – Watch the film clip from *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell had the opportunity to make history by running in the Olympics – but when it came to a choice between violating the Sabbath and seeking personal glory, he refused to compromise. One member of Britain’s Olympic committee observes: “...the lad is a true man of principle and a true athlete. His speed is a mere extension of his life, its force... we sought to sever his running from himself...”

- What does this mean?
- Is there a connection between Eric’s gift of running and his life of faith?
- What happens when we sever our life of faith from the rest of life?
- In what ways can we keep our life of faith connected to the rest of our life?

2 – Larry Crabb has written a book titled *The Safest Place on Earth*. He affirms the Church as the one place where we should be able to come to share our doubts, our weaknesses, our failures – and know that we will be loved in spite of it; where we can admit that we have yielded to the lure of culture to cast off all restraints, and where we gain strength to get back in the race.

- How can your group begin to develop the kind of intimacy that allows you to reveal your weaknesses to one another?
- How can the Church be that safe haven that accepts and yet expects more of us?

## WEEK THREE

### Swing for the Fences!

*Ambition is an uncomfortable companion many times. He creates a discontent with present surroundings and achievements; he is never satisfied but always pressing forward to better things in the future.*

– Lyndon Baines Johnson

### Day One Leaning Towers

*As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves..." Genesis 11:2-4*

As the quote from Lyndon Johnson reveals, ambition is not always an easy companion. The discontent it creates in our lives can be revealed in two ways: Gentile ambition lords it over people, making them feel small and unimportant in an attempt to elevate the one with ambition. Godly ambition drops to its knees, seeking to serve others and affirm their significance in the eyes of God. The question is which type of ambition we will pursue.

Genesis 11 tells the story of the Tower of Babel where the people attempted to *...build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may **make a name for ourselves**...* That is Gentile ambition, that seeks to make us king in our own kingdom rather than seeing the greater value and beauty of being princes in God's kingdom. The Tower of Babel had foundations as weak as the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Babel was built to man's glory, not God's glory.

What kind of tower are you building today? One to your glory? Or to God's?

**Prayer:** God, I pray that the foundations of my life will be deep and solid and sure so that I may stand straight and tall in the light of your presence. Amen

## **Day Two Tunnel Vision**

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Mark 10:42-52*

A number of years ago, the distinguished British historian Paul Johnson wrote a chilling article in the *Wall Street Journal* in which he diagnosed the cause of much of the suffering throughout history. There are two kinds of people, said Johnson - people of the head and people of the heart. One of the great causes of suffering in history stems from

our tendency to concentrate too much power into the hands of people of the head and not enough power into the hands of people of the heart. Intellectuals have a passion for ideas. Their utopian dreams are often oblivious and cruel and unfeeling toward human beings. In the words of Snoopy: "Mankind they love; it's people they can't stand."

Vladimir Lenin who led the bloody Russian revolution never set foot in a factory until he was already leader of the Soviet Union; he was a library socialist. The Romantic poet Shelley drove two women to suicide and abandoned his children. Johnson quotes one leading American intellectual who, after Chairman Mao massacred three million people in his cultural revolution, gently chided Chairman Mao in an editorial in a major American magazine saying, "Was it really necessary for the Chairman to kill so many?" Mao (and the intellectual who could only gently chide him) had severed their head from their heart.

Johnson reminds us that people must always come before ideas, and not the other way around. Blind Bartimaeus came into Jesus' life at a moment when Jesus' life was as hectic as a politician's on the campaign trail – He was moving through one town after another on His way to Jerusalem, surrounded by crowds and excitement and along comes Blind Bartimaeus. Many of us would have said, "Go away, I don't have time for you right now, you're unimportant in the scheme of things. I'm the one who's important. I'm off to save the world." But Jesus slowed down and took time to minister to Bartimaeus, healing him of his blindness.

Are you taking time to focus on the people around you? On how your actions affect them? Are you taking time to serve others? Or are do you have tunnel vision that can see only to the pinnacle of success?

**Prayer:** Lord, deliver me from the tunnel vision of personal success and glory. Give me sensitivity to the people around me that I may seek to serve others as you have served me. Amen

### **Day Three**

#### **Heart and Soul...and Mind**

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Luke 10:25-27*

Several years ago, physician Frank Meshberger noticed something intriguing in Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine chapel. He saw that the background behind God in the scene depicting the creation of Adam looked remarkably like a cross section of the brain. Meshberger remembered that Michelangelo was known for his dissections of the human body...so now being debated is a whole new understanding of this painting. Was Michelangelo painting a picture of God bestowing on man the gift of intellect?

We are not asked to park our brains at the front door on the way in to the sanctuary; quite the contrary! Christ Himself commands us to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and **mind**. Many Christians would paint the Sistine ceiling with God the Father reaching out from the heart instead of the brain. Yes, Christianity is all about heart, we must accept Jesus into our heart, but we must also accept Him into our mind.

Jesus was an intellectual. At age 12 he confounded the most brilliant men of Israel with his grasp of the law. Christians need to be intellectually ambitious. We have a particular



calling to gain wisdom and insight into God's world and into God's word. Are you exercising your mind through the study of God's Word?

**Prayer:** Lord, show me the depths and riches of your Word so that I may grow in knowledge of you. Keep the connection between my heart and head strong and solid so that I may serve you with heart and soul and mind. Amen

## **Day Four**

### **The Pinnacle of Beauty**

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.* Colossians 3:23-24

Until the age of flight in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, no one was able to see the top of the Statue of Liberty's head. The sculptor, Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, could not have anticipated that anyone but he would ever see Lady Liberty's head. And yet, when you examine aerial photos, you can see the exquisite detail and the painstaking artistry with which the sculptor finished off the coiffure gracing the top of Lady Liberty. Bartholdi used the same care on those unseen portions as he did in finishing off her face, arms and torch which he knew people would see every day as they sailed up the bay. What a picture of how we Christians should do our work. Our boss sees the top of the statue. As Paul says, we are *to do all things heartily, as unto the Lord.*

One of the key questions we all have to ask is, "What do I want out of life and am I willing to pay the price to get there? A French writer remarked: "The colonel who retires on a farm in the country would have liked to have become a general; but if I could examine his life, I would find some

little thing that he neglected to do, that he did not want to do. I could prove to him that he did not want to become a general.”

The first question in the Shorter Catechism is “What is man’s chief aim?” The answer: “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” If we really want to glorify God, how can we give Him less than our best in everything that we do?

**Prayer:** Lord, let me work today with all my heart, doing everything for you and your glory. Let my day be filled with enjoyment of you. Amen

## **Day Five**

### **Joy in the Journey**

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-14*

It is one of life’s ironies that it was in the boardroom of Enron that I learned one of the most important lessons on not taking shortcuts and not cutting corners. Several years ago, Ken Lay invited me and eleven other people to have lunch with David Beshears, the famous mountain climber, film maker, and producer of the Imax film *Everest*.

David Beshears was on Everest on that fateful day May 10, 1996 when a blizzard claimed the lives of eight people. The problem, said Beshears, was that there were so many people on that mountain who were not adequately prepared to be there. The day before, David Beshears says he looked

through his binoculars and saw a rope line of forty people – he called it a conga line – and of those 40, 25 of them had no clue what they were doing. Their only qualification was that they had the \$65,000 dollars to pay guides who were willing to take them. Like me, they were weekend joggers, not fit for the rigors of climbing the highest peak in the world. And yet they expected to dash in, up the mountain and be back home in time for carpool, work, and the next adventure. They wanted the glory of reaching the top without the hard work and preparation needed to do it right.

After Beshears recounted the heartbreak of talking with his friend Scott as he died on that fateful day, one of us around the table in that meeting with Beshears asked, “What is the lesson for us in all this?” David Beshears thought for a minute and said, “Find joy in learning how.” When a player hits a home run in the World Series, everybody says, “I want to do that.” But for that player, the satisfaction comes from having been a boy who learned to play catch with his dad in the back yard, then playing right field in Little League, then high school, working his way up through the minors...and years later when he hits that home run in the World Series, it’s the recollection of the journey that gives him the joy.

The same goes for developing a relationship with God. Some of us pick up a Bible, get impatient with trying to understand it and toss it aside. Or we try praying and it’s boring so we give up. We come to church whenever our fancy strikes us and we wonder why doesn’t it do anything for us. Nothing worthwhile in life is accomplished without sheer determination and sacrifice and sustained focus.

Find the one thing that matters most to you in life and go after it with all your heart. *This one thing I do...* Find joy in that journey.

**Prayer:** God, give me strength and determination for the journey of life. Deliver me from a tendency to take shortcuts and lead me in the joy of learning how. Amen

### **Small Group Exercise:**

1 -Discuss the four aspects of Godly ambition. How can they help redefine your understanding of work?

- A desire to serve
- A discipleship of the mind
- Ruthless focus and determination
- An act of worship as “unto the Lord”

2- Does ruthless focus and determination preclude taking time to serve others along the way? How can we maintain balance between all four aspects of Godly ambition?

3 - View the film clip for week three. Are there areas of your work in which you feel God’s pleasure as you do it? Why? Why not?

## Week Four

### Whistle While You Work

*It's interesting—the way in which one has to balance life—  
because you have to know when to let go and when to pull back...  
There's always some liminal (as opposed to subliminal) space in  
between which is harder to inhabit because it never feels as safe  
as moving from one extreme to another*

- bell hooks

### Day One

#### The Spin Cycle

*The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:  
"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly  
meaningless! Everything is meaningless." Ecclesiastes 1:1-2*

I remember when Becky and I had three children under the age of five – boy, do I remember! I was working to build the church I was serving and mine and Becky's biggest arguments were over who was more exhausted. Becky would say, "Don't complain to me about how exhausted you are. If you would take more time away from the church and help around the house I wouldn't be so tired I have a cold right now." She'd be so desperate for sleep in the afternoons that she would put the girls in a room and then go to sleep across the doorway so if the girls tried to get out she'd wake up.

I worry about so many people I see in our church who are obviously exhausted. I don't know about you but when I am exhausted I'm not very Christ-like. I turn into a cranky old bear, not exactly the right attitude for a minister, snapping out, "And what do YOU want?" When I am exhausted and stressed and fatigued I notice myself struggling with the question of meaninglessness. Why do I do this to myself? Why am I working so hard? What's it all for? There are days

when I feel like I've been caught in the spin cycle and everything just keeps going in endless circles, wringing all meaning from life.

The writer of Ecclesiastes recognizes the endless, repetitious cycles of life and asks how can we find meaning? Are you struggling to find meaning in your life? Does it seem to have no purpose? Christ tells us He is the source of meaning and purpose and only in Him can we find relief from a purposeless existence: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:28-29*

**Prayer:** Lord, deliver this day from meaninglessness. Let it be defined by the purpose you have for my life. Rest the gentle yoke of your presence on me so that I may learn from you today. Amen

## **Day Two** **Finding Rest**

*I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. Ecclesiastes 2:4-11*

Many of us endure the grind of daily work with visions of the golden years of retirement when our lives will finally have meaning, purpose and fun. But listen to one retiree's reflection on life:

Since I retired from life's competition  
Each day is full of dull repetition

I get up every morning and dust off my wits  
Go pick up the paper and read the obits  
If my name isn't there, I know I'm not dead  
So I get a good breakfast and go back to bed

If we can't find meaning in work and we can't find meaning in leisure and retirement, where can we find meaning? Solomon tells us in Proverbs 19:22 *What a man desires is unfailing love*. All of our working and planning and struggling for success is meaningless without love. In Christ, we find an unfailing love that picks us up and infuses our lives with meaning and purpose. Is your goal to reach a rich retirement or to rest in Jesus?

**Prayer:** God, sometimes the struggle to find meaning in life weighs heavily on me. I find myself seeking meaning in things of this world. Remind me today of your unfailing love for me and turn the desires of my heart to your love so that I find my rest in you. Amen

### **Day Three**

#### **I've Reached the Top, Now What?**

*I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. Ecclesiastes 2:4-11*



“Well maybe it’s because I’m not a big enough player in the game of life. If I were a Bill Gates, or a Warren Buffett or President Bush - someone up at the top - then I would find meaning in what I do in my work.” That’s what we tell ourselves.

In his interview with Diane Sawyer, Mel Gibson talked about a time in his life when he had everything most of us wish for, a loving family, fame, and fortune. And yet, he said, he was close to self-destruction because of a deep sense of despair. Do you remember the internet mailing several years ago?

The Paradox of Our Time in History is that  
we spend more, but have less;  
we buy more, but enjoy it less.  
We have bigger houses and smaller families;  
more conveniences, but less time;  
more medicine, but less wellness.  
We read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.  
We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.  
These are the times of tall men, and short character;  
steep profits, and shallow relationships.  
These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce;  
of fancier houses, but broken homes.  
We've learned how to make a living, but not a life;  
we've added years to life, not life to years;  
we've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul.

Solomon was the King of his nation when he penned the lines in today’s scripture reading. He had wealth to the point that he *denied [himself] nothing [his] eyes desired* and, still, life was meaningless.

*From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him- may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. Psalm 22:25-28*

Solomon's father, King David understood what must be at the core of our existence if we are to find meaning; David learned through painful, costly experience that worship is the place where God transforms those endless circles into a journey of relationship with Him. In worship, God reminds us that we are not human doings but human beings, children of God and of infinite worth to Him.

**Prayer:** Lord, I confess to multiplying my possessions and too often reducing my values. I have made a living, but not a life. Take this day, Lord, and turn it upside down from the values of this world so that I live right side up with you as the focus of my desire. Amen

## **Day Four On the Road Again**

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So **Abram went**, as the LORD had told him... Genesis 12:1-4*

In his book *The Gift of the Jews*, Thomas Cahill describes the encounter between God and Abraham as perhaps the most important moment in the history of civilization. It was at this moment that humankind grasped the idea of a future. Until then, humanity believed that the world was ruled by a

myriad of capricious gods in constant battle with puny little humans caught in the middle of the battlefield. The best they could hope for was a little stability so they worshiped the seasonal cycles of the sun, the moon and stars and the passage of the seasons. Abraham, however, encountered the real, the living God who created the universe. God told Abraham, "Go! Your life is not a holding pattern. It is a journey to a destination that I have chosen for you. If you go to the land I will show you, I will bless you and give you children and make your name great." (Cahill)

So "Abraham went..." Cahill describes these as two of the boldest words in literature, for in that moment Abraham forever defined the nature of faith. Faith means leaving where you are and going someplace you've never been before.

I believe God loves roads, that His favorite author is Rand McNally. The Bible is full of stories about people to whom God said, "Go!" Those who listened and "went" found themselves on a journey beyond description. For the children of Israel it was following a pillar of fire across a trackless wilderness; for Jesus it was the road up Golgotha to the cross; for Paul it was a whistle stop tour of the Mediterranean.

Sometimes our road is physical, other times it's spiritual or emotional but the central metaphor of faith throughout the Bible is that of a journey.

Are your bags packed? Are you ready to go?

**Prayer:** Lord, how many times have I heard you call and failed to respond with a readiness to go? It is so easy to stay in the comfort and safety of the known rather than adventuring into the unknown with you. Give me faith and

courage to respond to your call and the comfort of knowing that you have charted my way. Amen

## **Day Five**

### **The Rest of the Story**

*For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Genesis 20:11*

When I was in my thirties I had the privilege of teaching a class at Fuller seminary while I was serving in the pastorate. Just recently I ran into one of my students who is now a very successful pastor on the West Coast. He said to me, "Vic, you know, you said something back there that I've never forgotten. You said, "If you plan to be a preacher... and you're going to take a half an hour slice out of the lives of several hundred people every week, then part of your job description is to be an interesting person. Part of your job is to have a mini-experience every day and a maxi experience every year...' You have got to be interesting!"

One of the most important lessons I've learned in ministry is that if you let people dictate your schedule and you don't take a Sabbath, you only think you're scoring points. The reality of a schedule full of nothing but committee meetings and counseling, and people to see, is that you never go for a walk or take in a play or wander in a museum or do those things that nurture your own soul. The cruel irony is that will make you so boring nobody's going to want to hear what you say.

My most productive time is when I rest. I will push, push, push against some problem and finally throw up my hands and say, "Forget it..." That's when the lights start coming on. There's even a joke in our family – when I go for a bike ride, all these ideas start coming to me and I have to think up

an acrostic to remember them so I can write them down when I get home. Your Sabbath will make you more effective.

Carl Sandburg in his biography of Abraham Lincoln says that in Lincoln's early years came the secret of his later strength: *In wilderness loneliness he companioned with trees, with the faces of the open sky and weather in changing seasons, with that individual one-man instrument, the ax. Silence found him for her own. In the making of him, the element of silence was immense.*

Don't you think it's time for a Sabbath rest?

**Prayer:** Lord, it feels too good to have a sense of importance. Incessant busyness feeds that need to be needed and keeps me from seeking Sabbath rest in you. Let me do my job well this day, but lead me to moments of rest when I can re-center and focus my being in you. Lead me each week to long, satisfying encounters with you, the Living God, so that my value is always defined by my relationship with you. Amen

### **Small Group Exercise:**

1 - View the video clip for Week Four. Abrahams tells Aubrey that there are “10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence.” He so fears the consequences of losing that he is “almost too frightened to win.” Contrast Abrahams’ fear with the way in which he describes his friend Aubrey. What do you think is the difference between the two?

2 - St. Augustine said “Our hearts were made for thee O God and they are restless ‘til we find our rest in you.” Is there a connection between St. Augustine’s observation and Abrahams’ remark about being “forever in pursuit”?

3 - What is your greatest fear about taking a Sabbath?

4 - What recharges your batteries?

## Week Five

### Can I Know God's Will for My Life?

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference*  
-Robert Frost

#### Day One

##### At the Crossroads

*...and now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there Acts 20:22 ...through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. Acts 21:3b-5a Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.' Acts 21:8-11 ... When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." Acts 21:14*

When I was a boy I would stand with the refrigerator door open mesmerized by the choices before me. It used to drive my dad crazy; he would come up behind me and say, "You know, if you do that long enough, you'll turn into a penguin." He even offered to take a photograph of the contents of the refrigerator and paste it on the door so I could stare at that. I could circle the item I desired and he'd get it for me. It's hard to make up your mind when there are so many choices. Today we are faced with choice everywhere

we go. Starbucks seems to offer unlimited options on their menu, and the grocery store has an entire aisle devoted to nothing but cereal. And that's before you get to the serious stuff.

You may be wondering, "Should I change my job?" Or, "Which direction do I need to lead my organization?" Time and again, I've had members tell me, "Vic, I just wish God would give me the handwriting on the wall." In the Bible it always seems like the Holy Spirit is leading someone by the hand and telling them where to be when. Paul has a dream of a man from Macedonia saying "Come on over to us..." and that's how he knew where to go in his missionary journey. We think "Wow, if I had it together with God I'd have an internal GPS system helping me navigate life, too."

If you read the passage Acts 20-21, however, you will find that even for the Biblical heroes of the faith following God's will was not always clear cut. God's will for our life is not a blueprint – it's a dynamic relationship in which we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. God **guides** us in making decisions; He doesn't make them for us. When that relationship is broad and deep we are more likely to hear Him speak to us.

What are you doing today to deepen your relationship with God?

**Prayer:** Lord, deliver me from the desire to have everything laid out in front of me before I respond to your call. Let me have the faith of those heroes of the Bible who set out not knowing where they were going but certain that you were leading them. Give me the courage to say, "Here I am, Lord. Send me." Amen



## Day Two

### Magic or Mosaic?

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*  
James 1:5-6

I know too many Christians who are into what they call fleeces – (like Gideon in Judges 6:36-37). “Okay, God, if I get through the next intersection on a green light, I’ll know I’m supposed to ...” I’ve seen some people cast out fleeces that are pretty far out. I have a friend in the ministry whom I love dearly; he was convinced God was calling him to serve as a pastor in Chicago because he had three plane flights in a row where he sat next to people from Chicago. One day, we were walking down the street to have lunch and overheard a couple of passersby in their conversation say, “Chicago...” And he said, “There, you see, Vic.” Since then I keep listening for voices to say, “Honolulu, Honolulu.”

I honestly believe my friend would be closer to God's will if he asked does it make sense to move to Chicago instead of expecting some kind of magic instantaneous revelation. What are the opportunities available? Do they match my gifts? Can I support my family on what they pay? We Christians need street smarts, or as the Apostle James put it, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all (people) generously... James 1:5.*

Can we have the mind of God in those situations? The Apostle James says yes. For what we lack is something God gives generously. He says, *If any of you lack wisdom...* If you are utterly clueless, then get down on your knees and petition the Heavenly Father. Now some of us have not yet made prayer part of our daily lives but when we face one of

those dilemma situations go down on our knees for a nonstop prayerathon: "O God, show me your will. Show me your will..." Prayer binges don't reveal God's will nearly as well as regular, daily prayer, moment by moment living in the presence of our Father. If you truly want to know God's will, be in prayer every day and get in tune with the mosaic (which we will explore over the next few days) of God's guidance:

- Desire: what do you enjoy doing? God speaks to us through our desires.
- Feedback from others: what feedback are you getting from objective sources?
- Opportunities: move from the known to the unknown
- Inner Circle: do you have a close group of friends you can depend on to tell you the truth straight up, with no varnish on it?
- Sense of Call: Through prayer and meditation on Scripture, where does the Spirit seem to be leading you?

There's one important thing we need to keep in mind, above all. It may seem like a breathtaking insight into the obvious — if we are seeking God's will then it is **His** will we are seeking and our agenda suddenly goes from top of the list to the bottom. *Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.* Proverbs 19:21

**Prayer:** Lord as I enter the crossroads in my life, I pray for the courage to follow along your clearly lit path. I claim today the promise of James 1:5 knowing that you give generously when we ask. Cast away my doubts about your presence in my life and let me seek your wisdom and your will for my life. Amen

## **Day Three**

### **Missing the Picture**

*Desire without knowledge is not good, and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way. Proverbs 19:2*

George Orwell said that the worst advertisement for the Christian religion is its adherents. Orwell must have encountered the kind of Christian who thinks that Christians shouldn't have fun, should get no joy out of life and be perpetual nags, those who think that to demonstrate their love of God they must be doing something they hate.

Is that really what God wants from us? NO!!! Desire itself is one of God's gifts. In fact God speaks to us through our desires. He often leads us through our inner feelings. Believe it or not sometimes what God wants is what you want and one piece of discerning God's will is to listen to the desires of your heart. What do you love to do? The key to real success is to find something you love to do and get someone to pay you to do it. Author Willa Cather said, *Desire is creation, is the magical element in that process. If there were an instrument by which to measure desire, one could foretell achievement.*

But there's a danger in listening only to the desires of our own heart. It's critical that we also listen to the feedback we get. I love to sing. I've never met a karaoke machine I didn't like. If desire were the only criterion by which to seek God's will, I'd be a singer. The only problem is that when I sing, people go running with their hands over their ears.

What feedback are you getting? When you lead a Bible study, do people show up? If you paint, do people buy your pictures? You need to pay attention to the feedback you get.

Proverbs 19:2 tells us don't move so quickly that your desire causes you to miss the way. Take time to listen for the feedback.

**Prayer:** God, give me feedback today that reins in my own desires. Let me understand your desires for me so that I don't miss the way you would have me go. Amen

## **Day Four**

### **It's Not the Twilight Zone**

*David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. I Samuel 17:33-36*

*When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said.... God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me...so I have called on you to tell me what to do. I Samuel 28:5-7, 15*

Do you remember the *Twilight Zone*? It was a T.V. show that explored the odd, the bizarre, the unknown. It would be a Twilight Zone experience to think that you could be a mountain climber if you were terrified of heights or an architect if you couldn't tell a straight line from a curve.

It always seems so amazing to us that David, just a boy, was able to kill the giant Goliath. But have you ever thought

about how many times David must have taken target practice with that slingshot as he sat out in the middle of nowhere watching after his sheep? Or how many times did he have to go after a lion or bear intent on killing his sheep? Goliath was a pretty big target for a sharp shooter like David. He was prepared for what God called him to do. What has God prepared you to do? What kind of skills do you use every day that you never thought about applying to a work environment?

God called on David to kill Goliath because King Saul couldn't get his army to do the job. Saul failed to surround himself with godly friends who would give wise counsel and time after time he wound up in the wrong place at the wrong time doing the wrong thing. At the end of his life, King Saul was so desperate for advice that he sought counsel from the Witch of Endor – a fatal error. Saul didn't hear God because he wasn't listening to God. He preferred listening to the very people God told him to avoid.

God prepares us for what He calls us to do and if we will only listen to Him he will guide and direct us.

**Prayer:** Lord, I thank you that you have prepared me for what you call me to do. Surround me with godly friends who give wise counsel; and make my hearing sensitive to the words you deliver to me. Amen

### **Day Five Caller I.D.**

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3:5-6*

I love my cell phone with its ability to tell me who is calling. I've got Becky's information stored in my phone so when

she's calling, I know it's Becky before I even answer. Because I took time early on to make sure the information was there, I am never in doubt about whether I'm missing her phone calls.

There are times in life when we are desperate for a word from God, "Just tell me God, I'll do what you want me to do but you need to **tell** me." The problem is that we often haven't spent enough time with God to know when He is talking to us. In an early episode of the hit show *West Wing*, President Jed Bartlett is struggling over whether or not to commute a death sentence. Along the way he encounters a number of people who freely give their advice, but Bartlett cannot bring himself to the decision to commute. As the episode ends, Bartlett tells his childhood priest, "I prayed for wisdom, but it didn't come. And I'm really [ticked] about it." The priest tells him, "God sent you a pope, a rabbi and a Quaker, what else do you want?"

If we take the time to get to know God, to cultivate relationship with Him, we are rarely in doubt about when He is calling to us. Knowing God's will is more about knowing God, being in relationship with him rather than being able to read His mind on those occasions when we are in dire need. Proverbs tells us to let God into **all** aspects of our lives and then we will know His desires for us.

Are there parts of your life you're still holding back from God?

**Prayer:** Lord, give me the patience and willingness to cultivate a relationship with you. Open every area of my life and flood it with your presence. Amen

### **Small Group Exercise:**

1-View the film clip from *Bruce Almighty*. What does Bruce desperately want here in this scene? Is God speaking to Bruce? What are all the ways God is trying to get through to Bruce? Why doesn't Bruce hear God speak to him? What is it Bruce misses, doesn't see at all?

2- View the film clip from *The Apostle*. Read Psalm 13 – is there any similarity between the Psalmist and Sonny? What can we learn from them about God's capacity to love us? Is it okay to go to God in anger, to reveal to Him our anger at Him?

3 – Look at the mosaic of God's revelation.

- Desire
- Feedback
- Opportunities
- Inner Circle
- Sense of Call

What is it you are seeking God's will about today?  
How can this mosaic help you understand God's will?

## **Week Six**

### **How to Lead in Tumultuous Times**

*Leadership does not always wear the harness of compromise. Once and again one of those great influences which we call a Cause arises in the midst of a nation. Men of strenuous minds and high ideals come forward.... The attacks they sustain are more cruel than the collision of arms.... Friends desert and despise them.... They stand alone and oftentimes are made bitter by their isolation....*

**-Woodrow Wilson**

### **Day One**

#### **Let Us Now Haze Famous Men**

*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD I Samuel 8:4-6*

When I was a boy, four generations of my family attended our church. Our pastor was Pastor Alderman, a rather formal but kindly man who loved the word of God. Pastor Alderman had founded the church and served as its pastor for thirty years. By the time I was in Junior High School, I began to hear rumblings that Pastor Alderman didn't have it any more that his sermons were kind of dated, and young families were beginning to find their way down the street to the big Baptist church. There were undercurrents that maybe it was time for a change. I will never forget how that change was made. Some board members called Pastor Alderman into his office before worship on a Sunday morning and told him, "We've polled the board and we want you to step down" Just like that. After thirty years, founding pastor. I will never forget as a teenager sitting in church that morning watching this man



in the pulpit so devastated that he could not preach. He just stood there reading scripture with his voice quavering for half an hour.

Being a leader means the agony and the ecstasy of knowing people at their best, and at their worst. As leaders, how do we respond when people are at their worst? I remember reading an interview with Walter Cronkite many years ago. When he was asked about his critics, he said, "You have to remember that most people don't love you and they don't hate you. They're thinking about themselves." In other words our critics usually don't hate us personally. They're operating out of their own anxieties, fears, and experiences. Knowing that helps us put our critics in perspective, and not lash out and respond in kind. For when we are attacked we have a choice. Will we go down the road of vengeance or down the road of forgiveness? I love what C.S. Lewis says, "The angels of God hold their breath to see which way we will choose to go."

Samuel's response to Israel is a model for us. PT Forsythe once said, "Prayer is to the religious life what original research is for science—by it we get direct contact with reality." Are you getting direct contact with reality?

**Prayer:** Lord, deliver me from being like those church members in Laodicea who were neither hot nor cold and who could think only of themselves. Let me put away my fears and anxieties and rest in the comfort of your arms. Amen

## **Day Two**

### **A Crisis of Confidence**

*So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps*

*were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.* Nehemiah 4:6-9

A recent write up about the Cadillac XLR reads *You can keep that keyfob in your pocket or purse, hang it around your neck like a pendant or wear it as a pinky ring because you won't need it to start the XLR. The car knows when you've arrived. By the time you have opened the long, heavy door, your seat has been adjusted to your body and mirrors adjusted to your liking. Once the seatbelt is buckled, you simply put your foot on the brake, press the start button and the V-8 comes to life.*

We have a romanticized view of leadership today that believes the leader is treated by the organization like the XLR treats its owner – with everyone just waiting to meet every need before the leader can express it.

If only people were as easy to control – but any leader today will tell you that's nowhere close to reality. No sooner has the organization noticed you've arrived than it seems someone is trying to boot you out. ABC news recently reported that in 1966, 55 percent of those surveyed had a "great deal" of confidence in the people running major companies. By 2002, this number had fallen to only 13 percent, one percentage point behind organized labor and one point ahead of lawyers. Leaders in corporations, schools, government and churches change more frequently now than ever before. Though there was a time when society valued more than anything else the long term leader, today's leaders wear out their welcome almost before their name is on the door.

Why is leading so difficult today? Why are leaders an endangered species? One reason leadership is so difficult today is that we have an unrealistic view of leaders and place impossible expectations on them. We expect that our leaders don't take days off, don't go to their kids little league games and work when they have the flu. We want them to be soft and cuddly, but razor sharp brilliant strategic thinkers; we want them to have profound empathy, but crisply administer the organization with efficiency. In short, we expect our leaders to be morally and physically superior beings.

Leaders are vulnerable because they have flaws. They aren't morally superior to other people. If you lead anything from the refreshments committee of Little League (or if you take your life in hands and are a little league coach) to Secretary of State, in this day and age leadership is stepping into a turbulent environment.

I have a friend who is in charge of the entire nuclear power operation for Southern California Edison. Don't think he hasn't taken a lot of heat through the years. He says, "The only legitimate concern for a leader is whether your critics can keep you from accomplishing your goals. Anything else is sheer sentimentality." In other words it's nice to be liked but if you're doing your level best within what you believe to be the will of God, then what your critics say is not worth the worry.

**Prayer:** Lord, make me aware of my own imperfections and deliver me from a sense of superiority. Wherever I am called to lead, make me a servant of those I am leading. Most of all, let me pursue your will and not be diverted from my calling by the voices of critics. Amen

## **Day Three**

### **Following the Leader**

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him... By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Hebrews 11:6, 8-10

Back in college I took a psychological test. It was one of those three hour mind benders that leave you wondering, "Maybe I am crazy after all!" One statement I'll never forget was in the true false section. It said, "I am a special agent from God." True or false. It was obviously there to smoke out the crazies. I thought about it - and marked true! Later when it came time to sit down with the campus psychologist he kept referring to what he called "my excessive religious needs." He thought I was a couple of bubbles short of plumb! Can you image what that psychologist would have had to say to Abraham?

We are called by God toward the future. The leaders we read about in Hebrews 11 saw themselves moving toward the future in keeping with God's purposes. Leaders must strategize and make decisions based on limited knowledge. I recently read a description that compares being God's partner in the world to being the woman in Indiana Jones' life. There are moments when you wind up suspended upside down over a pit of snakes screaming, "God, what are you thinking God?"

Life is not a holding pattern. Life is a journey to a destination God has chosen for you. Will you be a leader by following God?

**Prayer:** God, deliver me from a holding pattern that would have me circling again and again the same familiar places. Show me the way you would have me go to pursue the destination that you have chosen for me. Give me the courage to make decisions in faith, not knowing the details, but sure in your sovereign providence. Amen

### **Day Four In the Arena**

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*  
Philippians 3:12-16

I love these great words by Teddy Roosevelt and I come back to them again and again:

*It's not the critic who counts, not the (one) who points out how the strong man (or woman) stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man or woman who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion and spends himself in a*

*worthy cause; who at worst if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.*

Do you remember the hit movie *Gladiator*? The character played by Russell Crowe faced incredible odds – and the stakes were life and death. But he refused to give up. In the end, though he failed, he triumphed – because he stayed in the arena.

**Prayer:** Lord, it is so easy to give up and give way when the stings and arrows of resistance begin to fly. Each time I am knocked down and bloodied by the effort to live in your will, pick me up, brush me off and send me back into the arena to try again. Deliver me from the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat and let me savor the triumph of staying in the fight. Amen

### **Day Five Simply Used**

*And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Hebrews 11:32-34a*

When we receive the gift of relationship with a personal God and trust that God with bold confidence in the future, He tailors for us a unique call based on the context in which we find ourselves. Abel's call was to sacrifice; Enoch's call was to walk with God; Noah's call was to build a different

environment for both human and animal life; Abraham's call was to relocate; Sarah's call was to give birth in old age; today each of us can hear the unique calling of God. We need to ask, "Lord what is my call in this day. What do you require of me.?" Listening daily gives us the opportunity to hear answers.

I have a lifelong friend who over the years has lived with that kind of trust and patience. My friend and I are not very much alike. He's sensitive, artistic, brilliant, and sadly, schizophrenic, even to the point of suicidal at times. To this day he is my model for abandoning myself to God. My friend has a fragile grasp on reality. For years he's had a scrap of paper taped over his desk with these words from the great Catholic Cardinal John Henry Newman:

*Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him. My sickness, my perplexity or sorrow may be necessary causes of some greater end, which is beyond me. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life. He may shorten it; He knows what he is about, He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sick, hide my future from me. Still He knows what He is about. I ask not to see. I ask not to know. I ask simply to be used.*

**Prayer:** Lord, what is my call this day? What do you require of me today? Open the eyes and ears of my heart that I may hear and respond to your call. Use me today, Lord. Amen

### **Small Group Exercise:**

1 - View the video clip from *Crimson Tide*. Gene Hackman's character is a leader who ceased to have followers. What happened? Discuss trust and what it means to be trusted as a leader.

2 - Look at the lives of some of the great heroes of the Bible: Abraham, Moses, David, Paul. All were flawed individuals. It was not their perfection that made them leaders. What was it that did make them leaders?

3 – Historian Daniel Boorstin wrote: *Two Hundred years ago, when a great man came among us, we looked for God's purpose in his life. Today, when a great man comes among us, we look for his publicist.*

Who were your heroes when you were growing up? Were they celebrities or leaders? What makes the difference? Does it make a difference in our lives if we look up to heroes rather than celebrities?