

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

**Our Premier
Digital Issue!**

SPECIAL FEATURE:



**The Antidote
for Despair**
By Mark Rutland

ARTICLES THIS MONTH:



**7 Disciplines
of a Leader**



**Go for an
Upgrade!**



**The Forgotten
Timothy Principle**



A Message from Our Bishop

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

This new digital publication will be a source of strength for our IPHC leadership.

Sometime in the late 1990s I was in the conference office in Georgia late in the afternoon. A pastor of one of our smaller congregations called and asked if he could visit me. Earlier in his ministry he had been a district leader in another Pentecostal denomination. At age 60 he brought wisdom and experience to the conference. I had no reason to suspect anything unusual other than the common concerns related to pastoring local churches.

He sat on the couch and began talking. In just a few minutes his voice began to halter, then choke up, then break as tears flowed. I sat and listened, praying silently for him and for me as he composed himself. I'll have to admit, I thought of several things: Was he about to confess to stealing money? Was he having an affair? Was he getting a divorce?

He finally composed himself and said: "I am a failure. I've pastored this church for four years and all we have are 30 to 40 people. I go to the church growth events the denomination sponsors; I read the books; I try the new methods. Nothing works. I have failed as a minister." He began to sob again. I was stunned. This was not the confession I expected. My heart began to break for him as the pain of the loss of his self-worth poured out. He felt he was a disappointment to me, to his denomination and to Jesus! It was almost more than I could bear.

We spent the next hour listening, talking and praying as I tried to encourage a man who was broken by his failure to live up to perceived expectations.

Through the years I've never forgotten that experience. That dear brother is now with the Lord. I spoke at his funeral and was reminded that "our labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). This first issue of *Encourage* represents a new global outreach to IPHC ministers. I've been blessed to visit our pastors and leaders on every inhabited continent and see where many of our pastors live and serve. Regardless of our cultural, social and economic differences, I've discovered that all of us need to be encouraged.

From the new church plant meeting in a small home in North India to the largest of IPHC congregations in the U.S. and Hong Kong, ministry leaders need to know that brothers and sisters in Christ

are standing with them. Those of us whose ministries are no longer directly in the local congregation also need to be encouraged. This goes for those in conference and denominational leadership as well as those who serve our institutions.

It is my prayer that *Encourage*, through new digital technology, will become a resource of hope for you. It's interesting to me that the Greek verb translated "encourage" is parakaleo. The noun is paraklesis and a similar

word, parakletos, is usually translated "comforter" or "helper," and it refers to the Holy Spirit.

It is proper that a Pentecostal church be an encouraging church! It is also proper that we begin to see holiness not merely as something that applies to an individual; holiness has a corporate dimension! The apostle Peter envisioned the church as a "holy priesthood" (see 1 Peter 2:5).

I believe *Encourage* fits within the vision of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church as we become "A place of hope and a people of promise." We need to hear from one another around the globe. We need to learn from one another around the globe. We need to pray for one another around the globe. We have a global mission, but our need for encouragement is local. Through God's strength, we can do this for one another!

As I reflect on Paul's encouraging words in 1 Corinthians 15:58--"your toil is not in vain in the Lord"—I remember that the apostle said this in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our personal victories and successes are never enough to sustain us. Only the resurrection of Jesus gives us the hope and encouragement we need. I pray you will stand in that encouragement—and share it with others! □



BY DOUG
BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Director, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries.

Encourage

A place of hope. A people of promise.

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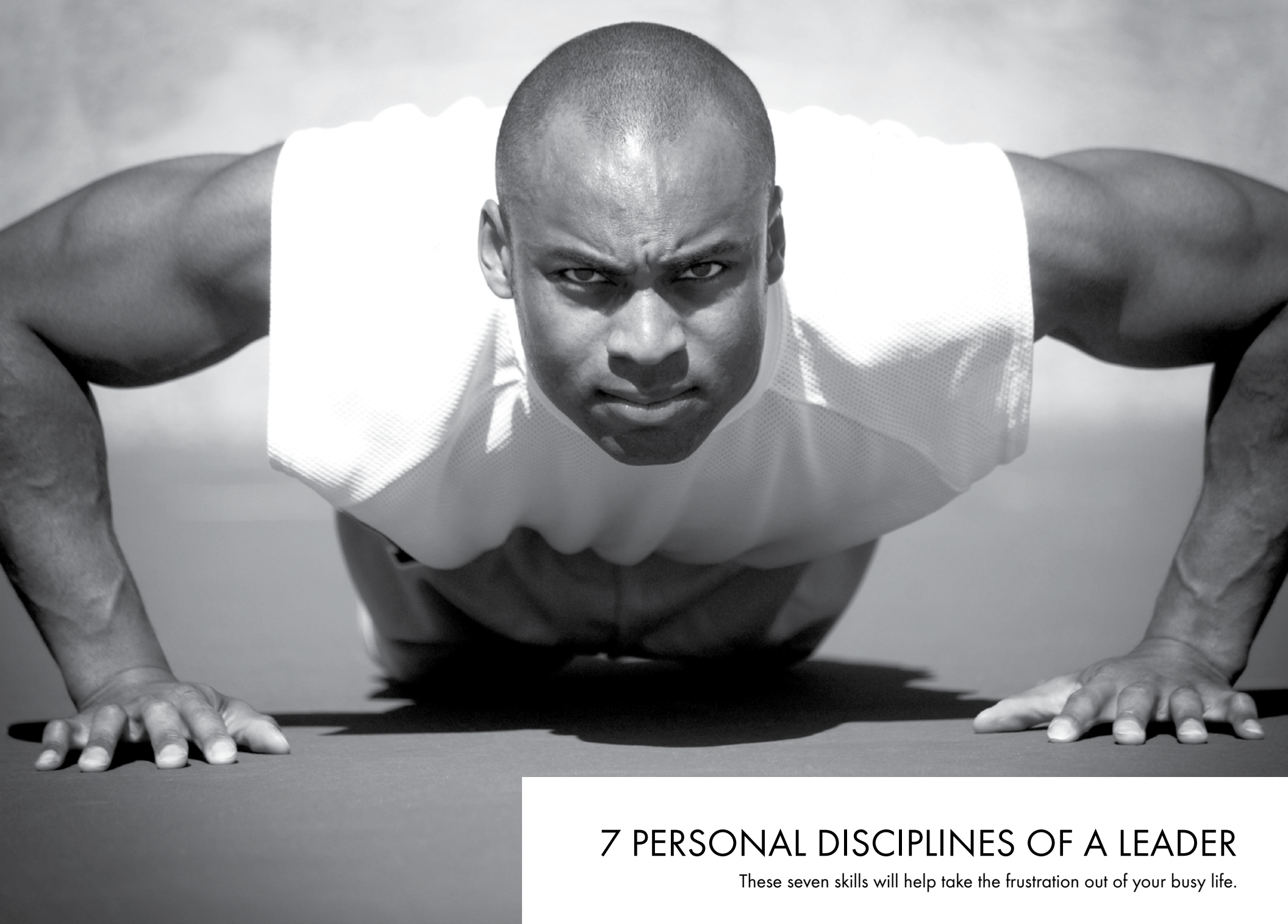
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7 PERSONAL DISCIPLINES OF A LEADER

These seven skills will help take the frustration out of your busy life.



BY JOHN
CHASTEEN

JOHN CHASTEEN has served in pastoral leadership for many years. He later served as dean of the graduate school at Southwestern Christian University. Today he directs The Chasteen Group, a life-coaching ministry based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He is also the author of *Coaching the Next Generation*. You can read more of his writing at heycoachjohn.com.

A recent article by Richard Blackmon in the Los Angeles Times stated that pastors are “the single most occupationally frustrated group in America.” Is that really true? I’m not sure if I agree with his blanket statement; however, having spent more than 30 years in the trenches as a pastor and leader, I concur that ministry is a challenging vocation for several reasons.

First, there has been a shift in the expectations of church members in recent years. People today have been trained to be individualistic consumers, so they have high expectations for a pastor and the church they attend. Second, the average pastor today wears many more hats than pastors in previous generations. Third, many leaders today struggle with a “hurry up” mentality. We want to reach our goals, and we want to reach them now!

Regarding the third reason, it’s important to realize that ministry is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Until we shift our thinking to this biblical view of ministry we will continue to be frustrated. So what does a disciplined view of ministry look like? Here are a few disciplines I’ve practiced and taught over the years. They are simple yet often overlooked skills that can make a big difference in your life. I call them the personal disciplines of a leader.

Discipline #1: You must become internally rather than externally motivated.

Unfortunately we have far too many ministers today who are externally motivated. They require the right conditions for everything— a certain feeling, a huge crowd, big offerings and numerous other conditions—before they can get “inspired.” Something is wrong with that picture. There will be times when you and I do not feel like praying, reading our Bibles, preparing a sermon or doing any of the other tasks that ministry demands. But we must do them anyway!

Could this be what the apostle Paul was saying to Timothy when he wrote: “Preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season...” (2 Timothy 4:1)? I think so. Learn to become internally motivated by the Holy Spirit rather than relying on outward conditions.

Discipline #2: Become skilled in the art of crisis management.

Somewhere in your church is a problem waiting to happen. I’m not being negative, just realistic. If you are dealing with human beings, you will have problems. We must quit thinking that most problems will take care of themselves. They won’t! At times ministry is about crisis management. How we deal with crises has much to do with our future. Ask Moses if crisis management had anything to do with his future! In Numbers 20 he mismanaged his crisis, and he got himself banned from going into the promised land. King Saul’s inability to handle a crisis led him to take matters into his own hands instead of waiting on God (see 1 Samuel 13)—and he was disqualified.

How do you handle crises? Do you ignore them and hope they disappear? Maybe you explode and get angry with your staff? Or maybe you simply withdraw? Why not take a proactive stance and learn how to manage ministry crisis?

Discipline #3: Become more than one-dimensional in your life and ministry.

Being a one-dimensional pastor means you focus only on ministry all the time; if you do this you will certainly burn out. This is a simple



Charles Spurgeon on Discouraged Pastors

“If you do not encourage your minister, your minister will probably sink down in despair. Remember that the man himself needs encouragement, because he is weak. Who is sufficient for these things?

A discouraged minister is a serious burden upon the congregation. When the fountain gets out of order, you cannot expect to find water at any of the taps; and if the minister be not right, it is something like a steam engine in a great manufactory—everybody’s loom is idle when the motive-power is out of order.

See that he is resting upon God and receiving his divine power, and you will all know, each Sabbath day, the benefit of it. This is the least thing you can do. There are many other things which may cause you expense, effort, time, but to encourage the minister is so easy, so simple a matter, that I may well press upon you to do it.”



concept; however you would be surprised how many pastors violate it for months and years on end.

Jesus took time to separate Himself from the multitudes (see Mark 6:31). So should you. Have you learned to guard your personal and private life? Elijah succumbed to pressure and ran from Jezebel because of burnout. Moses struck the rock twice when once was enough. I wonder what you and I are capable of?

I’m not advocating laziness or slackness in ministry. I’m simply saying if you don’t take care of the other dimensions of your life, you will suffer. You have physical and emotional needs. You need recreation, exercise, fellowship and fun. You and I are not one-dimensional work-horses. Learn to lead from freshness rather than frazzle!

Discipline #4: Embrace periodic spiritual renewal to stay connected with God.

I’ve observed that most pastors become good at the ministry skills required to get the job done. They become polished at ministry; they become skilled, adept and even gifted. For this reason, it is easy for ministry to become routine.

Over the years you can learn the right way to say things, how to move the crowd and how to create the right response. The next thing you know, ministry becomes nothing more than a mechanical series of motions meant to impress. You must take great care to insure that your ministry does not become mechanical and predictable.

Consider the following warning signs that routine could be creeping in: (1) You stop studying for personal enrichment or growth and only study for the purpose of sermonizing; (2) You stop inspiring people and start manipulating them; (3) Personal success and recognition replace God’s glory; (4) Human reasoning takes the place of God’s wisdom and anointing. If you see any of these habits developing in your life, take a break and ask the Holy Spirit to reignite your passion!

Discipline #5: Give regular attention to leadership issues.

One of the first lessons I learned as a pastor was that if I didn’t take the lead in my church, somebody else would. What a tough lesson to learn! I’ve found that few churches suffer for a lack of preachers; however many struggle because of ineffective leadership.

Pastors come in many shapes and sizes, but for the sake of time and space let’s narrow it down to two categories: those who are gifted in leadership and those who aren’t. In order to be effective, those who are in the non-gifted group must become skilled in leadership, and those on the gifted side must hone their leadership skills. Either way, all leaders must develop and grow.

Discipline #6: Recognize that the will of God often moves slower than we think it should.

One of the greatest challenges for ministry leaders is waiting on God’s timing. Have you ever noticed that His timetable is rarely the same as yours? This is a hard pill to swallow in this high-tech, instant-messaging generation. Waiting on God separates the men from the boys!

God’s timetable for Abraham included 25 years of painstaking preparation. Moses endured 40 years on the backside of the desert. King David’s story was no different; he spent nearly 10 years as a king in exile. The will of God often moves slower than you and I think it should; therefore, patience is a great virtue.

Discipline #7: Learn to handle the disparity between expectations and hard reality.

Someone once said: “False expectations, like cataracts, must be removed because there is no way around them.” Wrong expectations can be clergy killers because they tend to inflict undue pain and stress. Wrong expectations could also include unrealistic and unfulfilled expectations.

This is a constant challenge in the life of a minister that must be continually addressed. You need a good friend or coach to act as a sounding board and a thinking partner so that you don’t get discouraged.

Don’t live your life in frustration. Develop the disciplines of a leader and learn to enjoy the journey. □



GO FOR AN UPGRADE!

If you want to be a successful leader, check your heart and make sure pride is not lurking in your heart.



BY FRANCES
PIKE

FRANCES PIKE is a speaker and author who travels extensively. She and her husband, Garnet, lead Spirit Life Ministries in Oklahoma City. She is author of *Created to Rule Together*, a book about gender partnership in ministry.

After a week of ministry at a pastor’s conference in England, I was sitting in the airport waiting to return to the United States. The young couple traveling with me went to grab something to eat, but I was too tired. As I sat at the departure gate watching our bags I suddenly heard someone call my name.

“Frances?”

I looked up and saw an employee of the airline standing in front of me. She was the wife of one of the pastors I had personally ministered to at the conference. After greeting her, she asked, “May I have your boarding pass?” She returned in a few moments with a new boarding pass—and she had upgraded me to first class!

I wasn’t expecting an upgrade. I just assumed I would be traveling home in the economy cabin. But this woman just happened to see me in the departure lounge!

Often in our travels we have observed frustrated, haughty customers demanding upgrades. But I have learned the best way to get an upgrade is wait for favor or to ask with humility.

Arrogance works against upgrades. We should know that from Scripture. Pride goes before a fall. In Isaiah 14 we find that when all of heaven was worshipping the God of heaven, Satan decided he wanted to be worshipped! He manifested the downgrade attitude by saying, “I will.” His pride got him the biggest downgrade ever! He was thrown out of God’s holy presence. What a descent!

Pride descended into the earth realm called the Garden of Eden. It is there that we see pride continuing to challenge the presence and authority of God. Pride has not changed. It will always be in conflict with God and His will. Pride will always lead to a downgrade. Lucifer’s identity was changed by his pride. The fall from lead worship angel to a serpent was an identity crisis.

We see that pride is often subtle and cunning. Pride gently and sweetly appeals to our human desires. It tells us that forbidden fruit is “good for you.” It tells us that the forbidden fruit will make us wise, even like God. It tells us that God would not forbid something so good! The Prince of Pride has infected our world with such deception—and many people fall for this lie. Pride always appeals to our flesh.

Pride is deceiving in its subtlety. Once we believe deception, we are held in it’s chains by pride. Truth becomes vague, and we become confused. We begin to question what God has said and decide we know better. So we choose the forbidden, believing it is true. That is a downgrade!

Eventually we beome conscious of our mistake, but we often continue in our pride. We have to cover up! We grab whatever we can to look good. We blame someone or something that will cover us. We hide for a while so no one finds out. We deny our actions with a little lie. We do whatever it takes to preserve our image.

Cover-ups are like costumes—they are quite uncomfortable. We live as great pretenders, not sure who we are. Our true identity is masked. We try to live in our own image because we have forsaken our God-given image.

Now pride has set us up in our deceived state to walk in independence and rebellion to our maker! So the downgrade continues to spiral us into a self-sufficient, self-righteous life. We have no need of God—and ultimately of no one else. We believe the great deception. We become gods unto ourselves.

As leaders we must be conscious of our vulnerability to the downgrade. Not only will it bring us down, but we will bring others down with us. Because we are leaders, many people are affected by our attitudes. We lead by attitude more than action. Our attitude comes from the heart. The spirit of our hearts pervades our followers.

This is very obvious with parents and children. Young children begin to manifest the same attitudes as their parents. An attitude of pride or humility will affect those we lead.

When we fall into the downgrade trap, we may also put a lid on others so they will not upgrade. Pride does not want others to succeed, especially beyond where we are. As leaders we are to call forth God’s image in others, not suppress it.

God has called leaders to serve. We are to inspire others to discover their purpose and empower them for greater effectiveness. But if we allow pride in our hearts, we will only care about our own destiny. We won’t encourage others to find theirs.

Let us go for an upgrade by denying ourselves and following our leader, Jesus Christ. As He humbled Himself, so we should humble ourselves as we lead others to know the power of humility. □

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RECLAIMING THE FORGOTTEN TIMOTHY PRINCIPLE

If you are always focused on the crowd you will never have a lasting impact. Wise leaders know they must invest in the few.

Back in 2011 I went to the nation of Colombia to preach in a conference sponsored by two churches in the city of Barranquilla. I could have gone alone, but I asked Jason, a young IPHC pastor from South Carolina, to accompany me on the seven-day trip.

When we boarded our first flight to Panama I said to Jason: “You are going to grow two feet during this adventure.” He told me when we were preparing to come home: “I think I grew two-and-a-half feet.”

Nothing thrills me more than challenging young leaders by taking them on the mission field. I’ve done this in Nigeria, Ukraine, India, Peru, Bolivia, South Africa and other places. It’s not always convenient to share a bathroom or double the travel costs, but the reward comes when I see how much the experience stretches their faith and accelerates their spiritual growth.

It’s what many call the Timothy Principle, and it’s found in Paul’s words to his spiritual son in 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Paul discovered long ago that the most effective way to expand the reach of the gospel was to invest deliberately and personally in younger disciples. Although he preached to crowds, he always traveled with a small team. He wasn’t a one-man show. He shared his life with people such as Timothy, Silas, Phoebe, Lydia, Luke, Priscilla and Aquilla—and they became spiritual giants. We would be wise to reclaim this forgotten art of personal discipleship.

Here are four guidelines I’ve developed for effectively training the next generation:

1. Get on the same level.

One young leader I have been mentoring for a few years, Charles, once told a pastor that he wanted to be trained in ministry. The pastor explained this “training process” would require Charles to carry the pastor’s Bible, pick up his dry-cleaning and serve as a chauffeur. The pastor didn’t offer to pray with Charles, take him on a trip or share how to hear the voice of God or lead a sinner to salvation.

Some pastors even groom young leaders to be “armor bearers” who are nothing more than unpaid valets. I’ve seen some big-city bishops with celebrity entourages—including a guy to carry the preacher’s Bible, another to carry his water bottle, another to carry his handkerchief and a fourth to fan him when he’s sweating.

This type of leader is infected with a virus known as egotisticus giganticus. He may call himself a “spiritual father” to these men, but they really don’t have access to his life. They might as well be his slaves. This is not biblical discipleship. Any real spiritual father (or mother) will invite his disciples to get on his level and learn both the practical and spiritual sides of ministry.

2. Be a genuine friend.

Young leaders today don’t just want to listen to a pastor’s sermons or wait outside an office door until he asks them to bring him a cup of coffee. They crave real relationships with humble, accessible men and women of God who can model authentic Christianity. That requires plenty of one-on-one communication. You must invite younger leaders into your life and let them get up close and personal.

Some charismatic churches today have developed a weird lingo that prevents genuine discipleship from happening. While I certainly believe in the role of apostles and spiritual mentors, I don’t think we have to throw these titles around. Don’t strain the relationship by insisting on a title. Just be yourself, and the anointing on your life will do the rest.

3. Offer plenty of ministry opportunities.

Before I arrived in Colombia with Jason, I let my hosts know that Jason was available to speak in churches and youth meetings. Even though they had invited me to speak at a conference, I wanted Jason to be stretched in his faith. He ended up leading several powerful meetings with youth in the city. Then, on the last night, when I was addressing a group of leaders from two churches, I called Jason to come to the platform with me so he could pray and prophesy over people.

We won’t effectively raise up younger leaders if we only allow them to carry our briefcases or work at our book tables. They have to do the real stuff! I was so proud of Jason when he called several people to the front of the church and offered anointed prophetic encouragement. The Colombians loved him, and the youth who had been in his meetings lined up to hug him when we left. In the end, Jason realized that he was a ministry partner with me, not just a trainee.

4. Impart your life.

Young leaders today need to become effective communicators, and they must learn how to flow in the Holy Spirit’s power. But we can’t just give them a dry, mechanical education. We have to follow the apostle Paul’s relational model. He told the Thessalonians: “Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:8). We must take a deep interest in those we are mentoring and lay our lives down for them sacrificially.

Discipleship requires authenticity and genuine love. And it focuses on individuals. As much as I enjoy speaking to crowds, I have learned that often the most effective ministry in the kingdom of God is to the one, not the multitude. Please don’t ignore the Timothys you are called to encourage. □



By J. LEE
GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an ordained IPHC minister who serves as contributing editor of *Charisma* magazine and as editor of *Encourage*. He also directs The Mordecai Project, an international missions organization based in Florida. He is the author of *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale* and other books.



THE ANTIDOTE FOR POISON BERRIES

Discouragement is one of the biggest enemies of a minister. Don't let it kill you.



BY MARK
RUTLAND

MARK RUTLAND has served in church leadership for more than four decades, beginning in the United Methodist Church before leading Pentecostal churches and schools. Most recently he led Southeastern University in Florida and Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma. Today he writes and preaches from his home in Georgia. He is the author of *Relaunch*, *Nevertheless*, *Dream* and other books.

What are the top ten causes of depression for people in ministry? Let me list them. You know them already but let me call their terrible names:

- failure
- fear of failure
- rebellious opposition
- disappointment
- mental and physical fatigue
- loneliness
- stress (usually financial)
- frustration
- accumulated hurt
- anger and unresolved inner issues.

I see these problems as a cluster of poison berries—and they can be fatal to ministers. These are the “big ten” causes of depression as I have observed them, not in some distant, statistical study, but up close and personal. I know I am not unique in this experience.



I have occasionally struggled with depression throughout my 46 years of ministry. I have known dark moments and personal failures. I have been deeply disappointed in myself and struggled at times to stay in ministry, or even to feel that I should stay in ministry. During one truly terrible season, only the grace of God kept me in my work—and that was mostly because of my wife, two friends (who refused to let me quit) and the wise and anointed help of a trained counselor.

Does this shock you? Are you thinking, “Why should I listen to this guy? He shouldn’t even be in the ministry!” Is that what you’re thinking? Then I submit to you I cannot think of but a handful of sturdy saints who should be in the ministry.

My own internal wrestling match has been almost unbearable at times. There were some dark nights. But when the sun came up the next morning I limped toward whatever shred of victory I could still find. The ministry is hard enough when all is well within and without. But it is an awful place to sort out our own inner needs.

In addition, at some point we all must finally face up to the naïveté with which we began. How many times have I said, “But they are church members.” Or, “But he is on my board. He was my friend. He prayed with me.” We’ve all heard about church wars, “demon deacons” and staff betrayals. We thought we were exempt. Of course those things happened to others. But this is me!

You know all the keys to spirituality: Prayer, the Word, accountability. You can name them and you have preached about them. They are incredibly important! But the question remains: What do I do when I have done all the right things, and yet I still struggle with deep, immobilizing, paralyzing discouragement? How do I continue in ministry when a dark despair settles on the parsonage like an inky night?

The opposite of discouragement is obviously encouragement. I hope the following thoughts will serve as an antidote for the cluster of ten poison



berries listed above. I will not respond to each of the ten individually. But I believe these points will help you endure the blue Mondays and desperate times that we all face:

- 1. You are not the first ministry leader to feel this way.**

Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah all struggled with discouragement. David battled back from moral failure at one point. At another time his followers contemplated stoning him for a strategic disaster. Paul lamented that all his companions had forsaken him. Jesus was deserted, denied, abandoned and betrayed. Furthermore, He pleaded to be excused from His very calling at the exact point where it was about to be put to the final test. I’m certain that sounds familiar!

Remind yourself that great leaders and spiritual giants have gone before you through this same valley. The fact that you are facing discouragement does not mean you are weak or petty. You are simply a leader who is facing what leaders have always faced!

If your youth pastor walks off with 30 percent of your congregation and starts a church around the corner (because “God told him to”), that is his failure, not yours. If a colleague treats you unethically, remember that is how leaders are treated from time to time. It does not prove you are weak. It proves you are a human being in leadership with other humans.
- 2. Talk to someone.**

Isolation, sensed or self-imposed, is a dangerous place to be. The challenge, of course, is that churches and ministers are notoriously gossipy, so it is often hard to open up to someone who could damage you. A professional, confidential Christian counselor can be helpful, especially if there are unresolved issues from your past or even childhood. Pentecostals tend to think that everything has to get sorted out at the altar, but I Corinthians speaks of “gifts of healing.” One of those gifts is wise, Spirit-anointed counseling.
- 3. Learn to rest.**

I once let myself get into a destructive pattern of over-work, over-stress and over-everything. Toxic success is no less poisonous than toxic failure. You must carve out time to rest physically. Above and beyond that, try to “rest” your current struggle, whatever it is, in the loving arms of Jesus. Remind yourself that God is not punishing me. He is not angry with me. He loves me and He cares about what I’m going through.
- 4. Do not try keep up with the Kardashians.**

Comparison in the ministry is deadening stuff. You are not responsible to be Joel Osteen. You are only responsible to faithfully run the race He puts before you. The “big” ministries, the TV guys, the “famous” preachers may not have their act together nearly as much as it appears. You do not know what they are facing even as you read this. Performance is not the currency of the Kingdom. Love is.
- 5. Do not let failure or fear of failure eat your lunch.**

If you have not failed at anything lately, it’s time to try something new. Babe Ruth’s home run record is famous. Lesser known is the fact that he also set major league strike-out records. Did a secret sin catch up to you? Was a brilliant plan of yours despised by those you lead? Did your most exciting vision flop? Welcome to the club.

Have you failed at something? That failure, if it even was one, is what you did. It is not who you are. Often, you cannot even tell for sure when you have failed.

I had gone through a particularly depressing failure when I received a note from a former student. He told me he had been dismissed from a position as associate pastor at a large church and he was feeling like a failure. He said he even thought of suicide.

Then, a sermon I preached about King David at Ziklag came to his mind. That sermon (a sermon I barely even remember!) pulled him through his trial. He was now excited to be moving on to new ministry. I was wallowing in my own struggles. I feared that my efforts had been useless and were certainly unappreciated. Then his letter arrived and I felt healing in every word.

You have touched lives. You have been used of the Lord. You have borne lasting fruit. You may not see it all now, but it’s still there. You have made a real and eternal impact on more lives than you think.

This is not a moment for dismissing the gospel or for allowing yourself to feel dismissed from ministry. It is the dawn of a new day. This agonizing struggle has been shock to your entire system, hasn’t it? Now, let His mercies, which are new every morning, fill you with hope in the knowledge that He is still God and He is still on His throne. □

A LESSON FROM GEORGE BAILEY

We all know the plot of the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*. George Bailey, the discouraged New York family man, gets to see how life in Bedford Falls would have turned out if he’d never lived. With the help of his bumbling guardian angel, George learns that his old boss would have become a drunk, his kid brother would have died and his town would have become a corrupt haven for criminals.

In the end, George realizes how much his small-town life mattered to his family and wide circle of friends.

Many pastors are like George Bailey. They don’t realize their work matters. Wisconsin pastor and author Paul Tautges recently blogged about the need for pastors to take time to see how their ministries make a difference. He suggests stepping back and asking these questions:

- How has the Lord used the labors of faithful men in the past to lay a foundation for your Christian life and work today?
- Has the Lord ever used you to mentor a future pastor, missionary, teacher, or other full-time Christian worker?
- How has the Lord used you in ministry outside your congregation?
- Has the Lord given you the gift of writing to produce a written legacy of faith and devotion for others?
- Has the Lord given you the opportunity to sit beside a dying member of your church and hear the person’s testimony that included gratitude for your ministry?
- Can you think of people whose faith has been strengthened under your ministry?

If you are battling discouragement, set aside a day to pray and reflect on the ways God has used you to change lives for His glory. □

