

WHEN GOOD AND GODLY PEOPLE COLLIDE OVER VISION
“Leading ...with the Mind of Christ”

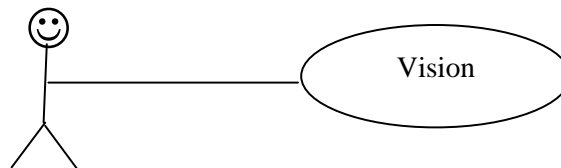
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INTRODUCTION

In mentoring church leaders we often focus on the joy of leadership. Not much is said to young pastors about the pain in leading others. It is true that individuals in leadership positions large or small have the potential to influence change and impact people. This is rewarding and we are energized. We experience joy! A vision captures us. Growth and expansion will result. Surely it is right. Everyone will agree! We will move ahead. The world will be changed. And we are grateful!

It has happened to many of us this week. A new vision has come to us for the people we serve. A renewed passion for growth and effectiveness in our ministry has gripped us. And we are energized and committed to make it happen! We are happy and a smile is on our face!

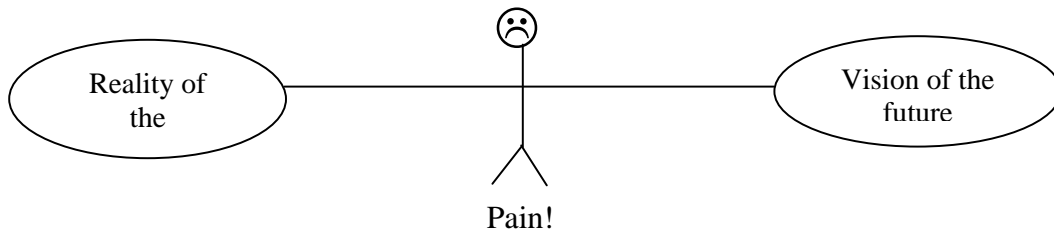


We don't talk as much about the pain in leadership. This pain can be illustrated by me standing with outstretched arms. In one hand, I hold tenaciously to the vision I believe God has given me for my assignment and responsibility. I believe it is the right action to take, policy to adopt, direction to pursue or goal to embrace.

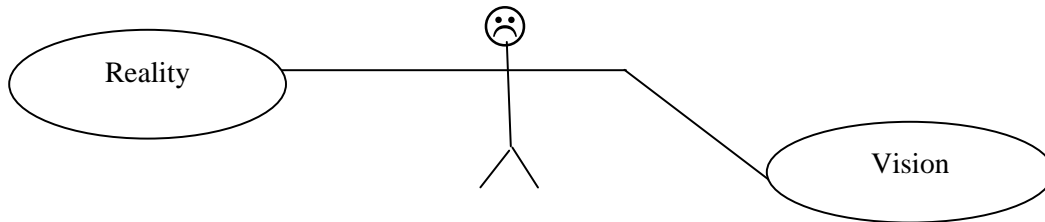
However, pain comes when the other extended arm is a hand firmly holds to “reality” – the situation or context in which I work. Our reality may include the circumstances (finances/ facilities) which seem to dictate what can and cannot be done. Our “reality” is often the people or followers who must embrace the vision if what is dreamed is to move from vision to results. Most of these brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we work are not at this conference! And

we are stunned when those with whom we work reject the vision that is cast or challenge the vision as it is presented. And we are SAD.

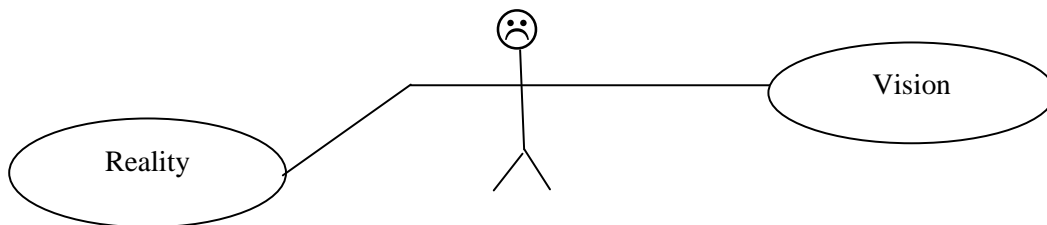
The tension in holding on to our vision of the future and to the reality of the present situation often produces pain.



If we relax one arm and let go of the vision, we drift along with no direction.



If we hold to the vision and let go of the people we are known as leaders without followers...and nothing happens



It is in holding, intentionally, to both vision and reality that the possibility exists for leaders to move from vision to action to results. And with this intentionality comes both joy and pain for the leader.

Why? Sooner rather than later, Christian leaders are jolted when we experience this reality:

- good and godly people often differ on how to reach mutually desired goals; and sometimes,
- these good and godly people sometimes COLLIDE ... and a faith community is

divided, the kingdom of God suffers and Satan laughs.

- When this happens, the pain in leadership is even more intense.

I have come to see that these collisions occur, not necessarily because of good or bad ideas, noble or sinful goals, or right or wrong solutions. Rather, good and godly people most often collide over VISION and VALUES in the faith community. And we are caught in the middle of a divided group of Christians over where we should be going (vision) and how we are going to get there (values).

And in the midst of these painful situations we ask ourselves, as leaders, these probing questions:

- Is it possible, in these situations, to live and work together as Christians so that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?
- If “in Christ, all things are made new,” then how does our relationship with Christ inform and guide us in the way we lead in these painful encounters?
- In the midst of these conflicting situations and seemingly irreconcilable expectations placed on us, what does it mean, really mean, to lead a divided faith community with the mind of Christ?
- How does our testimony of holiness of heart and life reflect itself in the way we lead, especially in conflict situations?

These questions frame my remarks to you about leading others and moving a faith community from vision to action to results. I have pursued these questions since 1978 when I moved to a cross-cultural teaching assignment at the European Nazarene College near Schaffhausen, Switzerland. Later, I probed these questions during my tenure in Manila at the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary and for eighteen years at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. I now reflect on these questions in my role as education commissioner as I work with the 54 colleges, universities and seminaries of the Church of the Nazarene in 35 countries worldwide.

It has been through answering with these questions that I began to cultivate the spirit of holiness needed to guide a faith community, particularly in challenging times. I have grown in my understanding of what it means to live and lead with the mind of Christ. And with this passion, I

continue to learn about the movement from a vision of the leader to action and results by the entire faith community, particularly in times of conflict and collision.

In light of the realities we face, I want to share with you seven “anchors” to hold us steady as faithful Christian servant leaders. Anchors to provide balance for us as we grasp firmly to our vision of the future and, at the same time, seek to move the church, district, field or region to action and desired results.

Anchor # 1: SPEAK GRACEFULLY

Issue: “Watch the words we speak.”

Principle: Words we speak can bless or “destroy” people.

“What comes out of my mouth reflects what is in my heart,” so Jesus states in the Gospels.

As leaders through the words we use, we either:

- Encourage or discourage those with whom we work.
- Lift them up or put them down.
- Speak positively or negatively about them.
- Reflect cultural sensitivity or cultural “blindness” to them.
- Focus on “them” or focus on self.

I often ask myself: how do others feel when they leave my presence?

- Stronger or weaker?
- Larger or smaller about themselves?
- Confident or “scared”?
- Understood or misunderstood?
- Affirmed or manipulated?
- Blessed or “destroyed”?

“The praise to criticism ratio with others with whom we work should be at about 80-90% praise or positive statements to 10-20% criticism or negative statements.” Good advice from Sven Walroos, Scandinavian clinical psychologist.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29

According to Ephesians 4:29, God uses the words we speak to others within the Body of Christ to extend His grace through us to them! What a powerful and probing thought!

Remember, the words we speak to those with whom we work especially those who differ and even collide with us, can bless them or destroy them. Choose to bless them!

Anchor #1: SPEAK GRACEFULLY
Anchor # 2: LIVE GRATEFULLY
Issue: Comparison is the root of inferiority.
Principle: “Don’t whine -- be grateful.”

Comparison is so pervasive in our society – in the workforce, the family, the local church or region, in our communities and particularly within ourselves. We can feel good about ourselves – our gifts, talents and abilities – until we compare ourselves with the gifts, talents and abilities of other people. We can believe our co-workers are adequate for the jobs we give to them until we compare their work – creativity, innovation, energy, collegiality – with others.

Comparison can eat us alive ... And rob us of joy, relationships, confidence and peace, and in the process, sap our energy and drain us of enthusiasm. Comparison can transform us from being a delightful district leader or local church pastor into a preoccupied, dejected, negative and disgruntled individual that other people only endure. What is the antidote to comparison? Three profound biblical qualities:

- Gratitude!
- Thankfulness!
- Appreciation!

We can choose to accept the people and provisions God in His wisdom has given to us. We can choose to work to bring out the best in others through seeing the best in them. In every situation, we can choose to be grateful, believing that God is in the midst of all that we are doing

(I. Thessalonians 5:18).

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. I. Thessalonians 5:18

Gratitude is the “life-giving” antidote to the negative impact of comparison. Remember: Don’t cry over what you don’t have; be grateful – in all things – for what God has provided. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

**Anchors #1 & 2: SPEAK GRACEFULLY
 LIVE GRATEFULLY**

**Anchor # 3: LISTEN INTENTLY
Issue: “Seek first to understand.”**

Principle: Understanding, not agreement, is the key to conflict management.

Believe that “good and godly” people can have honest and intense differences. I can tell you, after 30 years in higher education administration that good and godly people sometimes collide over vision and values. And you have similar testimonies!

This is why I have come to see that theological vision (what I believe about people / what I “see” in them) precedes organizational vision. (What I want for the church, district, field or region.) “God give me your eyes to really ‘see’ the people with whom I work.”

In conflict situations with good and godly people, I have learned to ask two growth producing questions:

- “What can I learn?”
- How can I change?”

Likewise, I have learned at least two growth inhibiting questions:

- “Why me?”
- What if...?”

As a leader I may be a good administrator. However, I must be a great listener. I can listen for understanding. And listen for what is said. Also, I need to listen for what is not said. Listening to the people with whom I work values them. They deserve to be heard. They may have the spiritual gifts needed to move the vision to action. Remember, understanding not agreement, is the key to conflict management.

Anchors #1, 2, 3: **SPEAK GRACEFULLY**

LIVE GRATEFULLY

LISTEN INTENTLY

Anchor # 4: **FORGIVE FREELY**

Issue: **“Be proactive in extending forgiveness.”**

Principle: **A spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.**

One of my profound life lessons is this: forgiveness has little to do with the external environment around me, and everything to do with my “internal” condition! Extending forgiveness does not wait for the “other” to request forgiveness. Remember the example of Jesus on the cross: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Luke 23:34

Was Jesus naïve? Did he really believe that those who were killing him did not know what they were doing? No! Did Jesus believe that by extending forgiveness, those who were slandering him and hurting him would cease their activity? No!

Jesus was not going to permit what others said against him or the evil they did against him to create a bitterness or resentment within him and thereby create a rupture on the relationship with God His Father. It simply was not worth it! “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!”

Extending forgiveness frees me from bondage to the other person. Too often, we permit persons

who have offended us to control us. “Great leaders,” we are told, “are shaped in the most challenging and difficult times.” Remember, a spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.”

Remember the first four Anchors: SPEAK GRACEFULLY

LIVE GRATEFULLY

LISTEN INTENTLY

FORGIVE FREELY

Anchor # 5: LEAD DECISIVELY

Issue: “Christian leaders combine deep humility with fierce resolve”

Principle: Our holiness testimony is reflected in and through the way we make and implement decisions.

It is in the tension within a faith community between our preferred future and the present reality that our decision making as leaders most often takes place. It is in this context that we live, work and lead. If holiness of heart does not reflect itself in these situations where good and godly people differ over vision and values, then our holiness testimony is only a doctrine and not a Life within us!

The Spirit of God within us and among us empowers us to take the “next steps” necessary to make decisions and to achieve the preferred results desired by the Body of Christ.

By now, you have heard me speak of the critical importance of RESPECT for our brothers and sisters with whom we labor as we pursue the biblical mandate to “Go...and make disciples...”

You have heard me discuss “respect” for our co-workers through:

- The words we speak,
- The life of gratitude expressed for them,
- Listening intently to them and valuing their perspective, and
- Forgiving them freely even as we desire for them to forgive us when our actions are un-Christ like.

Respecting our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those with whom we differ—even collide with us—is at the heart of what it means to lead with the Mind of Christ.

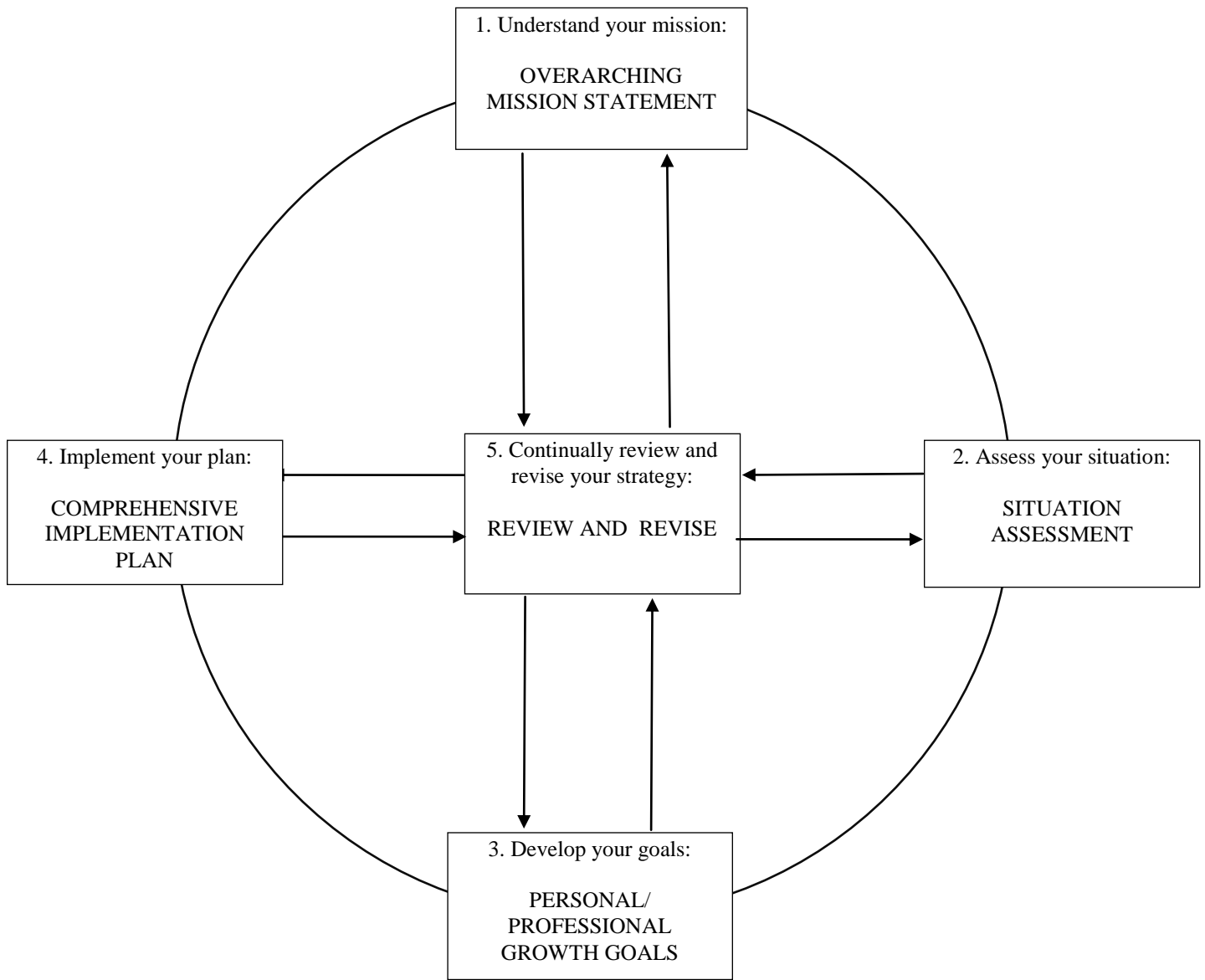
It is in these times of conflict over vision and values that decisions will need to be made—even when continuing differences exist. And, in these times, we will lead—lead decisively—but from our knees and often with a weeping heart!

Again, at some point in our leadership responsibilities, decisions have to be made. Decisions made after prolonged individual and collective prayer. Decisions made with fierce resolve and deep humility.

Pastors are the catalyst for evangelism and discipleship, change and action in the local congregation. If leaders are to move from the preferred vision to achieved results, careful attention must be given to the pastoral leadership roles of:

- Dreaming and planning
- Organizing and administering
- Motivating and encouraging
- Evaluating and reviewing

Let's focus for a few moments only on the critical leadership function of dreaming and planning.



Christian leaders, by God’s grace, plan for things to happen. These leaders

1. ...are deciders rather than drifters.
2. ...know where they are going, and how they are going to get there.
3. ...are results-oriented and not just activity-oriented.
4. ...are among the 3% who write down their growth goals.
5. ...pursue goal setting in the context of a broader planning strategy.
6. ...develop a mission statement.
7. ...dream great dreams.
8. ...understand leadership is the transference of vision.
9. ...are constantly involved in an ongoing analysis of their constituents.
10. ...establish growth goals.
11. ...are mission driven.
12. ...work hard at detailing programs and plans.
13. ...continually reviews and revises the planning strategy for growth.
14. ...expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.

These “movers from vision to results” establish mission and vision-driven growth goals and find ways to transfer these dreams to their people. They understand that the acid test of leadership is the transference of vision. For them, personal and professional growth goals are prayerfully considered and thoughtfully written out.

Prayer saturated goals and plans, written out and communicated often with passion, challenge the very best in results-oriented Christian leaders. They open up the doors to success in our “impossible” ministry assignment and mission calling. “A goal is a dream with a deadline!”

Remember, “Leading for change is not the same as the exercise of power” (George McGregor Burns, LEADERSHIP 9-28). If I can put a loaded gun to your head, I can get you to do things you might not otherwise do. But I’ve not practiced leadership, I have exercised power. True leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to.

Especially in times of conflict over vision, leaders must lead. Decisions will need to be made – even when continuing differences exist! And, in these times, we will lead – lead decisively – but

from our knees and with a humble heart! We must avoid paralysis – waiting until everyone agrees with us – when decisions need and must be made. We seldom “enjoy” the luxury of having all the information we need, before making necessary decisions. Sometimes, perhaps often, we must move ahead without everyone within the community agreeing with the vision or direction to be taken.

How do we move ahead, decisively, in these painful situations while, at the same time, show Christian respect to those who differ with us? We move ahead -- decisively – through

- Prayer, with them, for them and for “me” as leader;
- Collaboration, involving them when and where we can in the process;
- And with gratitude, thanking God, and “them” for their gifts, talents, abilities and testimony of faith in Jesus as Lord.

In this spirit of humility and brokenness, we move ahead:

- Confidently – believing that God is working in the midst of this difficult situation, and
- Decisively, not with paralysis or uncertainty, but with the conviction that God has spoken his word of vision and direction. A conviction that He will continue to lead His people to action even though the circumstances or attitudes may not give evidence of His work at the present time.

This is leading with the mind of Christ – leading decisively in the midst of complex and difficult situations.

To lead decisively with Christian humility demands that we continue to nurture and develop:

- Listening and communicating skills,
- Timing and processing skills,
- Affirming and encouraging skills,
- Asking and Inquiring skills and
- “Gift” discernment and delegation skills.

The more I know about Christian leadership, the more I realize there is to know. I am a committed lifelong learner and student of what it means to lead decisively with the mind of Christ.

Remember, the BIG question for Christian leaders: “How can my ministry of Christian leadership enable others to fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission in the world?” Let’s review the five anchors discussed thus far to hold us steady as we lead from vision to action to results. They are:

SPEAK GRACEFULLY
LIVE GRATEFULLY
LISTEN INTENTLY
FORGIVE FREELY, AND
LEAD DECISIVELY

The sixth anchor is this: CARE DEEPLY
Issue: “Value people, not power.” (or position)
Principle: The evidence of leadership is seen in the lives of the followers.

As leaders, you and I must keep remembering the many things we have in common with our colleagues and values we have in common. Focus on the things that unite us, not divide us.

I often asked myself these questions when I served at Mount Vernon Nazarene University: Are university employees stronger in their faith, more confident in themselves and more fulfilled in their work as a result of working at the school? Do I express appropriate appreciation, thanks and gratitude to MVNU faculty, staff and students? An appropriate contextual question may be this: Are the missionaries, district leaders, and pastors with whom I work growing in the Christian faith as a result of my working with them?

This is my bottom line: I tried to enlarge the vision of my people about the work they were doing. I want them to see the big picture. I wanted to assist them in discovering how they, in their particular assignments, fit into the grand scheme and purpose of the institution or region. I wanted faculty, staff and students to feel valued in their work at the university. I truly sought to value people and progress, not power and position. I wanted to be an encourager of “Joshuas,” the people with whom I worked and lived.

One book on encouraging those with whom we work tells us how to encourage the hearts of our co-workers:

- #1. Set Clear Standards (or Expectations)
- #2. Expect the Best
- #3. Pay Attention
- #4. Personalize Recognition
- #5. Tell the Story
- #6. Celebrate Together
- #7. Set the Example

ENCOURAGING THE HEART
James Kouzes and Barry Posner

The final anchor is this: PRAY EARNESTLY.

Issue: Some issues are only resolved and dissolved through prayer and total dependence on God.

Principle: God can work in *us* to become the change we desire to see in *others*.

Caring leaders know that we do not have the power to change others. Change *can* take place, however, *within us*! In the midst of experiencing honest and intense differences between good and godly people, the “pray-er” can be changed and transformed!

Conflict situations can produce growth. They can also inhibit growth in the lives of leaders. Before God in prayer, we seek answers from Him to these two questions: what can *I* learn; how can *I* change?

In so asking, and seeking God’s answers to these two questions for *our* lives as leaders, *we* are changed! Increasingly, we become the change, by God’s grace, we desire to see in others. Others around us may or may not be impacted by what happen within us. But, what happens to *us* is transformative!

We grow. We change. We mature. We increasingly exemplify the change we desire to see in others! And, in the process, we experience the peace of God which transcends understanding. In the process, we are “freed” from insisting on change within others.

Through earnest prayer, caring leaders asks the right questions, and trust God with the results...even as we are changed in the process! Amen!

IN CONCLUSION:

Let me summarize these leadership qualities that convict me at my worst and characterize me at my best. These “anchors” hold me steady as I seek to move the group for which I am responsible from a vision of the future to action to action and the preferred results.

- #1. I really want my words to be grace-giving, life-generating and inspiring to others and

not discouraging, depressing and draining utterances.

- # 2. I really want to be known as a person who is forever grateful, regardless of the situation, believing that God is in the midst of everything I do and is working to bring good in every situation.
- #3. I really want to listen to and respect the people with whom I work, to understand them – and for them to understand me – even if we do not agree with each other.
- #4. I really want to initiate forgiveness when I have been offended because I don't have the energy or strength to carry the heavy burden and guilt of an unforgiving spirit.
- #5. I really want to lead decisively with deep humility even as I experience the pain of holding tenaciously to the vision while acknowledging the realities of my situation.
- #6. I really want my relationship with others to energize them, to have a positive impact on their lives and to enable them, in some small way, to grow – become stronger – in their faith, their confidence in themselves and their competence at work as a result of our interaction in the home and on the job and with me as their leader.
- #7. I really want to pray in such a way that God will work in me in such a way that I become the change I desire to see in others.

And, I urge every one of you to increasingly be a Christian servant leader in whatever work assignment He gives to *you*. Discover your own answers – inspired by God's word and His Holy Spirit - to this probing question: "If 'In Christ all things are made new,' then how does my relationship with Christ transform the way I lead?"

Three fundamental convictions about Christian leadership in a faith community have risen within me as a result of wrestling with these issues, questions and leadership qualities. Convictions about:

1. **who we are as people of God;**
2. **what we are called to do in the work of God; and**
3. **how we live together as the family of God.**

Jim Collins, in his book Good to Great talks about the critical characteristics of leaders. He speaks of humility and fierce resolve as essential for Level 5 or top leaders. I believe that whatever else you discover in Christian servant leaders you will find that they:

1. Speak Gracefully. They watch the words they speak.
2. Live Gratefully. They don't whine, are grateful.
3. Listen Intently. They seek first to understand.
4. Forgive Freely. They are proactive in extending forgiveness.
5. Lead Decisively. They combine deep humility with fierce resolve.
6. Care Deeply. They value people, not power.
7. Pray Earnestly. They Pray for change in themselves even as they pray for change in others.

I leave you with these questions: which one of these “anchors” do you need most right now in your leadership assignment? As you experience the tension between the vision God has given you and the reality of your present situation, in which of these areas do you most need God to hold you steady? As you move from vision to results, what is your greatest need?

1. Speaking Gracefully?
2. Living Gratefully?
3. Listening Intently?
4. Forgiving Freely?
5. Leading Decisively?
6. Caring Deeply?
7. Praying Earnestly?

Be specific. Be personal. Be honest.

Another question. Which of these seven anchors is your greatest strength? Be honest with yourself and God. It's vitally important for us to affirm our strength even as we acknowledge our need. Build on your strength. Work on your need. Pray for that specific anchor you need, and give thanks for strength He has given to you as you lead your people from vision to action to results.

One more (really big) question. What new vision, big goal, or renewed passion has God given to you this week? For yourself. Your family. Your local church. District, your field, or for the region.

For you to move from this new vision and renewed passion to appropriate action and desired results, anticipate the joy *and* the pain that will come as you return to your ministry and begin to implement your big plan. Are you ready?

Remember the text (Philippians 1:27), “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.” This is the spirit of holiness. And remember this thought: Live and lead with the mind of Christ. Amen.

Prayer.