

Lead Diligently: Taking Initiative to Minister to Others

INTRODUCTION

Roman numeral I. Tonight, I want to continue in the series I have been doing on the Sacred Charge. We have been reviewing the seven commitments that about 5,000 young adults made at the onething conference in December 2008, and this one is a commitment to lead diligently. This is a call to take initiative. We must take initiative in our ministry to others. We are calling all who have made this sacred charge commitment as well as all other believers to take initiative to provide some of the leadership. Now, you do not have to be the top leader in a department or an outreach, but just be part of the leadership. Take some of the leadership in prayer meetings, Bible studies, outreaches, or an often overlooked significant ministry is in discipling people in twos and threes.

Every outreach, every prayer room, every Bible study, every endeavor has support systems. Those support systems are critical. If there are not leaders in the support system, the ministry really does not function properly. The apostles found out how important the support systems were in Acts 6 when the deacons were not in place yet, those who were serving in practical ways. But it is a leadership calling to serve in the practical ways: the widows were not being fed, or being well taken care of. There was chaos in the apostolic community. Here, we had twelve anointed apostles, but there was division and chaos because the support systems did not have their leadership in place.

The apostles got together and said that they were missing one wing of their leadership team. They had the public platform ministry and those things, but did not have the support systems in place. In our call to leadership, we are calling people to leadership in the support systems. They are critical. A significant part of IHOP–KC is the support system that keeps the ministries functioning in a proper way.

ROMANS 12: LEADING WITH DILIGENCE

In Romans 12, Paul gives a list of different gifts: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:6-8).

I am only highlighting two of the gifts here. “If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.” So at the top of Paul’s list, when it comes to prophesying, it is the issue of faith. It is not the only issue, but that is the top issue. He said to the one who leads let him lead “with diligence” (Rom. 12:8). Now diligence is not the only issue in leadership, but it is at the top of Paul’s list. You could have a skillful leader who lacks diligence and he will not nearly fulfill the full will of God in his life. Diligence is not the only issue, but I believe it is at the top of the list. I will take a diligent leader any day over a skillful leader who does not have diligence. The impact will be far greater.

THE DEFINITION OF DILIGENCE

Let’s look at a definition of diligence from the dictionary: “the constant and earnest effort”—I like those two words—“constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken with persistent exertion.” Earnest effort is the opposite of half-heartedness. Constant effort means long term, not short term. In the Western church today, the culture in the kingdom of God is a leadership style that lacks diligence. I do not mean all leaders.

There are certainly a lot of exceptions, but the primary leadership style is not earnest effort, constant earnest effort.

I am not saying that to be critical of the Church. That is not my point. I am saying it to highlight the great crisis in the Church today of leadership, and it really is a crisis of diligence. So we need wholehearted, earnest effort, and we need to do it for the long haul. Not for a summer, not for a year, not for a semester in school, but for decades, and we must stay constant. That is what diligence is. You cannot be diligent for a summer. The definition of diligence is constant. It is long term. That is part of the definition.

Diligence includes zeal. It is zeal in the way that we invest our time, our energy, and our money. It involves taking risks. It involves developing our God-given gifts. For example, I have a gift in teaching, and so as a teacher, that is my craft—teaching. It is not the only thing that I do in the kingdom, but that is one of the main things that I do.

I have put a tremendous amount of energy over the years in developing my knowledge of the Word in and of itself, just because it is good, but also because that is the assignment God gave me. Whatever assignment He has given you, you must develop your craft with zeal. Some people are musicians. Now, they are not only musicians, but being a musician is part of it. They want to develop that craft with great diligence. Some, it is technology. Some, it is administration and accounting. Some, it is the sound system. Some, it is the media. There are many different assignments. You want to develop your craft and your skill.

So diligence is not just an issue of what you do when you are “on the job.” Diligence is exerting energy and time to develop your gifting, so that you can fulfill your assignment before God in the highest way.

MANY LEAD WITH SKILL, BUT IT TAKES DILIGENCE TO REACH YOUR DREAMS

I have seen this over the years: many lead with great skill, but they lack diligence. Such people will never reach the fullness of their potential in God. Some preachers are such good communicators; they can tell stories to move people to tears, but they do not spend a lot of time going deep in the Word. Or the worship team: they can rest on their gifting and not go deep in their skill. There are many, many applications to this. It says in Proverbs 10:4: “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.” Or instead of the word *rich*, you could say the hand of the diligent enters into the fullness. They are rich according to what God called them to be. On a scale of one to ten, hypothetically, if God called you to have a three impact, and you have a three ability, you are rich. That means you are entering into the fullness of what God in His wisdom ordained for you. The goal is not to have a ten. The goal is to reach the fullness of what you have been ordained to do.

I do not want gifting in areas God did not give me. I do not want to go beyond what He gave me. Of course, you cannot anyway. My goal is to enter into the fullness of what has been given to me. Then, I stand before the Lord, and I can be called faithful, and the same is true for you. Now look at this verse in Proverbs 10:4. It says that the hand of the slack becomes poor. Now this slack person did not start off poor. This is describing somebody who had something and lost it, because as the years unfolded they lacked diligence. They lost what they formerly had. I have seen people in ministry do this over the years. A ministry is not just what you do on a platform. Your ministry is in the support systems, in the marketplace, from your home, and reaching your neighborhood.

MINISTRY HAS MANY DIFFERENT FACES

Ministry has many different faces. It is not just the departments on the church organizational chart. The person in the marketplace is called to ministry in the marketplace. The mother homeschooling her four children has a ministry, not just to them, but also to their neighborhood. All of us have ministry beyond just the typical boundaries of ministry as traditionally seen on the church organizational chart.

I have seen people who get a position in the marketplace or in ministry, yet because they lack diligence, a decade goes by, and that position is long gone. They lost it long ago. They got into it through a certain set of circumstances, or because they had a certain gifting, and the need was there. So the door opened. But they could not keep the position. Not that keeping a position is the point. They lost it because they lacked diligence. They were slack. Proverbs says this: the man or woman who is slack becomes poor; they lose what they formerly had.

Proverbs 12:24, 27: “The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to forced labor . . . Diligence is man’s precious possession.” The lazy man will end up being in a situation that they did not have to be in. Whatever you cultivate in your life, make sure that diligence is at the top of that list.

DILIGENCE IS A NECESSARY CHARACTERISTICS OF A LEADER

Roman numeral II. Now, we are going to look at a few characteristics of leaders. You can break this list down in other ways as well. One of the absolute top issues, if you are going to have a leadership role in your campus, in the marketplace, or in your neighborhood, is diligence. I am not just talking about being the main leader, but rather being one of the leaders in that outreach, endeavor, support system, or in that marketplace.

First of all, a leader is a man or a woman with a deep sense of purpose. They are going somewhere. They have a picture in their mind of where they want to go one day. They may not have all the details. They may not have a full picture, but the little bit that they have is clear. Nobody knows what their life story will be. You know, as the decades unfold, everyone is surprised about what happens in his or her life story. I am not even saying that they have the full picture, but that which they have is clear. They are going after it. They refuse to be denied. The reason they refuse to be denied is because it is a spiritual thing with them and God, meaning that it is a sense of an assignment from heaven. And if it is an assignment from heaven, this means that a part of their destiny is in it.

Maybe it is with someone on the college campus, and they want to lead people to the Lord. They are in their freshman year of college and they want to lead people to the Lord. They are serious about it. It is clear: I am going to be a soul winner. I am going to see this happen this year. I am not even talking about an elaborate vision. I am talking about even a short-term way, although they have a long-term vision as well. That person may think: I want to move in power; I want to heal the sick; I want to lead people to the Lord; I want to disciple people. I may not do it on a microphone, I may do it one on one, or in groups of two and three, but I am going to do this. I am going to learn to do this.

HAVING A SENSE OF PURPOSE

They get a vision. They get a clear picture of where they want to be now, where they want to be in ten years, and where they want to be in forty years. I encourage people to always have a short-term and a long-term vision. What do you want to do? Where do you want to be in terms of your ministry? Our life vision involves more than our ministry. Our life vision is what is going to happen in our heart.

My life vision is to walk in the first commandment at the highest level that God will give to the human spirit. I want an anointing to love God that will overflow to loving people. That is the absolute highest vision of my life, far beyond what I do at IHOP–KC. But I have a ministry vision; I want to see several things happen in my ministry. One of my goals is to make good handouts for you every Friday and Saturday. That is a real goal. Another goal I have is to go to prayer meetings. I want to lead in the leadership team, and I want to make handouts. These are part of my goals; I am not going to be denied that. Nothing is going to stop me from doing that.

The thing I am trying to do is to break it down practically. What do you want to do this year? For example, you say, “OK, I want to be involved in the prayer meetings.” That is good. “I want to make an impact on five students here. I want to touch some people out there. I want to impact my family.” Those are great goals. Again, a ministry goal does not just mean to fill the stadium one of these days in fifty years. It means real goals for now.

WRITE OUT WHAT YOU ARE DETERMINED TO DO

What is it that you refuse to be denied on? Write out what you are determined to do at the one-year period, the ten-year mark, and the forty-year mark. An example of that is that it was sixteen years of waiting before we started the International House of Prayer. It was 1983 when God told us that we were going to do 24/7 prayer. For sixteen years I knew we were going to do it. I did not have the specific application; I did not know how to do it, but I knew we were going to do it. I had the general direction. I did not have all the details.

You do not need to have the details, but you want to locate a few things that you refuse to be denied on. You are going to make an impact on a few people now in a certain way. You are going to touch God in a certain way now. You may shoot for a ten, and you may fall short of that, but if you aim for nothing, you get nothing. The guy who aims for ten may get a five. The guy who aims for five will get a three. The guy who aims for a three will get zero. The guy who aims for zero will hit the target.

A lot of people are aimless. They do not have any clear goals of being involved in leadership, like being in leadership over a few. Even if you are leading ten people, you are still in leadership. You are leading. You are helping. Maybe two of you are leading ten people. That is a real leadership calling. Now a leader can tell you clearly what they want. Can you tell someone clearly what your goals are? A lot of folks say that they know they are called to be a leader.

I say, “OK. What do you want to lead in?”

They say, “I do not know.” Sometimes what they mean is: I am called to be on the platform one of these days. They do not have a message, they do not have a burden, just “I am called to be anointed on the platform.”

I tell them, “That is not really a vision.” That is something else. I will not go into that, but I say, “What is the message you want to get to ten people, a thousand people, or a million people? What is it that you want to bring to others?”

They say, “I do not know. I am just going to be a leader. God told me.” They can only see themselves on a platform, and that is the end of their clarity. What I am saying is that they do not have a vision yet. That is not a

vision. You are not going to get a vision just in a moment. You have to sit and talk to God. What do you want to do in the next twelve months?

HAVE A CLEAR PICTURE OF WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

Get it clear. Write it on paper. Get an action plan. If you are called to leadership, you are going to do it with ten people, or a hundred people, or a thousand people. Again, you do not have to be the main leader, but you can be one of the leaders. You have to write it. If you cannot write it, you do not have it. You need an action plan. It may only have three or four steps. For example: I recruit a few friends; we meet in my home on Tuesday night; we decide we are going to have a prayer meeting; then we are going to have an outreach. There you go. That is the action plan. You have got it clear, but without an action plan and a vision, you actually will not get anything done.

The reason you write it down: you make the invisible visible for others. I mean even something as simple as we are going to go in the neighborhood and reach this many people. That is an invisible thing to the people around you. You are going to make it visible. You are going to say it, and they are going to say, “Oh. Are you really going to do it?”

You respond, “I am going to do it whether anybody else does it with me or not. I am going to go deep in the book of Romans this year in God. I am going to study the Song of Solomon. I am going to learn to get the grace of fasting. I am going to go somewhere, and I am going to get ten more people who buy into this.” Those are leadership gifts

MAKE AN ACTION PLAN

You need an action plan to develop your leadership gift. To learn the book of Romans, and then to get ten people to learn it with you—that is leadership. You do not need a microphone, but that is a leadership calling. You are leading ten people. It is real. Get it clear. What do you want to lead in? Get an action plan with two or three steps. Again, it may be as simple as talking to ten people, studying the book of Romans, and inviting them to your house.

Five of them show up out of ten. Two of them quit. So you are down to three, then you grow it up to five. You do it for a few months. You really did it. That is real. Well, first you have got to get a sense of purpose, vision, and get some clarity. You are going to take initiative. One thing that I want to really emphasize is a ministry culture of taking initiative.

TAKE INITIATIVE TO ACT

Leaders take action. Many people wait in frustration for years to be asked to serve in a ministry. That sounds kind of like a normal thing, but that is not a normal thing. Many believers grow up in a ministry culture where they do not take initiative. They wait for someone to tap them on the shoulder, and ask them to do something. They wait for years for somebody to find them on row ten, tap them on the shoulder, and say, “Would you be a leader?” They do not take initiative. They are waiting. That is a completely wrong approach to leadership.

Leaders take action. Leaders are hard workers. I mean even the work of prayer is hard work. Even taking your body, posturing it before God, fasting, praying, and reading the Bible—that is work. Now, I realize that when the Spirit touches us—that is a free gift. We are not earning the free gift, but it takes effort to posture ourselves

before God in fasting and prayer. It takes effort to train somebody, or to serve people. It takes effort to pray for the sick. That is effort. A leader is a worker. They take action.

Now many people, they wait in frustration for years, waiting to be asked to serve in ministry. I have been pastoring for over thirty years, and it is such a common wrong perception that people have. I talk to them. I say, “What are you doing?”

They answer, “Well, I am just still waiting to get plugged in. I have been around the church three years, and nobody has asked me to do anything.” That is a completely wrong mindset. I mean here in Kansas City, we have two million people in the greater metro area. We have a Bible, an open heaven, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and you are waiting for somebody in ministry to tap you on the shoulder and give you instructions? So that person just waits for years.

That story could be repeated hundreds of times. People are just dying in isolation waiting to fit on the ministry organization chart, to get permission, for somebody to tap them on the shoulder and give them the idea. They are praying that some leader will discover them as they are sitting idly in the congregation, or that maybe God will give a prophecy. That is not how the kingdom works.

THE KINGDOM REQUIRES TAKING RISKS

The way that the kingdom works is that you say, “Hey, I have got a beating human heart. I am saved. I have got an open Bible, an indwelling spirit, and a city full of lost people. There is a city with a church that is dull and lots of compromise. Let’s do it. Give me a few of them Jesus—saints or sinners, I do not care. I will help the saints get on fire. I will help the unbelievers get saved. Let’s do it.” The Lord will give you five, ten, twenty, thirty, maybe more.

People confuse waiting for permission with humility. They say, “Well, I do not want to promote myself.”

I answer, “You should not promote yourself in a place of honor, but that is not the same thing as taking initiative in the place of service.” So they have confused promoting themselves in a place of honor with taking initiative to serve. So they wait forever for somebody to ask them to serve. Again, the day you are born again, you are mandated to serve. Go find the place where you can serve. It does not have to be in the context of the ministry or with a position on an organizational chart. It might be; it might not be.

NO ONE CAN STEER A PARKED CAR: GO FOR IT

It is whatever the Holy Spirit puts on your heart. Go for it. For the first five years after I met the Lord, I was in a really fiery Presbyterian church. This church was connected to Campus Crusade for Christ, which emphasizes leading people to the Lord and making disciples, and so that is what we heard all the time. We used the materials from Campus Crusade for Christ, and we had a youth group of about 1,000 young people. I was in high school, and our leaders had this ministry culture where they encouraged taking an initiative. So when I was between sixteen and seventeen years old they would come and ask, “Well, what are you doing?”

I responded, “What do you mean, what am I doing? I have only been saved for a few months.”

They said, “Are there not unsaved people in your high school?”

I said, “Well. Yeah.”

They said, “Go start a Bible study. Go get some people.”

I answered, “OK. How?”

They answered, “Just go tell a few people, ‘Hey, I am starting a Bible study. That is it.’”

I answered, “Really?”

They said, “Yes. That is how all of us do it.” Back then, I did not realize what a gift it is to be raised in an atmosphere like that, because everybody did this; well not everybody, but it was a common thing. Now, I was sixteen years old. I had been saved six months. I said, “But everybody in my high school who has been saved, they know more than me. I cannot teach them anything.”

My leader said, “Well, good, go find somebody younger.” So I went to the junior high school. This is a true story. And every Thursday night when I first went to meet with junior high kids, I told them that I was starting a Bible study. The kids would look at me with disgust and say, “So what?”

I said, “OK. I want you to come to it.”

They asked, “Why?”

I answered, “Because I want to help you.”

They said, “Well! I do not need help.” I had to figure out how to navigate through these obstacles. For Wednesday night Bible study, ten or so junior high kids came. Here was the catch: I had to pick them all up with my own car. And there is a little bit of bribing here—I decided to take them to Dairy Queen for ice cream afterwards if they came to the Bible study. I took them to Dairy Queen almost every time afterwards; then I got another guy helping me because we grew our study to fifteen kids, so we needed cars.

They did not have any money. Nobody had money for the Dairy Queen or for the gas. So I went to my high school, and I said, “Hey! I will do some janitor work.” They gave me a job—as a high school student—they gave me the master keys to work in the high school on the weekends. These are nice keys. So, I made a few dollars a week. It was illegal, but I snuck my junior high kids in to help me clean on the weekends because I was giving them the free ice cream. I said, “Guys, come on!”

So I had a Bible study of about fifteen. I had a free workforce of about five or six kids. But at the end of the day, you can picture it; it was more work corralling them. I said, “You know what! I will just do these floors myself.” I did the floors with the machine thing. I did not have any time because I was on the football team, the track team, and I did really well in school because I was trying to get a scholarship for college, and so I worked hard. During this season, I had a lot going on. I had no time for this, but I wanted a few dollars so I could pay those kids ice cream to come to my Bible study.

FAITHFUL IN SMALL THINGS

I did that for a couple of years; then, I went to college. So now, I am eighteen or nineteen years old in college; I am a freshman at the University of Missouri with 20,000–30,000 students. My leaders said, “Well, just do in college what you did in high school and junior high.” So they told me to do it. I made a Xeroxed hand-written sign saying, “Bible Study, Thursday night, 9 o’clock at Tiger Towers Apartments.” I took and made about 1,000 copies of them. I walked through the campus. I knew almost nobody. I handed them out. Many said, “Bible Study, 9 o’clock, who is this weird guy?”

I ended up getting a couple of hundred college kids coming every Thursday night. It took a year to do. I passed out flyers every week. I found a sound system, rented it, got an overhead projector for the worship songs, and talked a guy into singing worship songs, even though he did not know any songs. The Bible study grew from thirty, forty, fifty and it grew to one or two hundred. About two hundred college students came as we started small groups. We had these Bible studies going at Kansas University, Kansas State, and all around the Midwest. Others led the studies as well, and nobody gave me a microphone. No one said, “Mike, here is a big Bible study. Would you lead it for us?”

There was no Bible study, and no one I knew had a vision for one. So, I just made a little handout and passed it out. People started coming, and a few friends told a few friends. It started building because I was called to be its teacher. My point is this: I did not wait for somebody to give me an opportunity. A lot of folks are waiting for someone to tap them on the shoulder and say, “Hey! Would you lead over here?” and they answer, “Yes. Finally somebody knows who I am!”

We did not have that. We did not blame anybody for not opening a door. We did not blame anybody when it was hard, or when it fell apart. Some of the ministries we tried fell apart. So what? I took responsibility for their failure, but pressed delete and moved on. I mean, they were hosting Bible studies at Kansas University, Missouri University, Kansas State, and the different universities around us.

Then, I started a Bible study at another college. I drove home (Kansas City) every weekend because my brother who was paralyzed was at home. I was away this one year at school. So, I would come home and be with him on the weekend. So I started a Bible study at Warrensburg because it was halfway between MU and here. I went as a total stranger on the campus, and I did not know anything. So I passed out the flyer and grew a Bible study with about thirty to fifty people. I started this Bible study because I was coming and going anyway, and I just started discipling people. I began to meet with groups—twos, threes, and fours of college students. I had about four or five groups.

AS I TAUGHT THE BIBLE STUDIES, GOD WAS TRAINING ME

Those were the days when I did not even like prayer, fasting, or Bible study. I loved meetings, but I did not like Bible study. I told God, “I love You God, but I do not like prayer, fasting, witnessing, or Bible study. Everything else I like.” But I was teaching Bible studies. I would just take books, memorize what A. W. Tozer said, and it was really a mess because I had no idea what I was doing. I would give the message verbatim. Then a guy would ask me a question. Of course, I had no idea what the answer was because I had just memorized the concept.

But what was happening the whole time was that God was training me. I thought I was training them. He was training me, but not just in the Bible. He was giving me confidence that this is doable. A lot of folks sit for years

and are waiting for somebody to do something and hand them something. That is a completely wrong concept of the kingdom of God. It does not matter what your situation is—you can have a ministry. Even while I was at the University of Missouri, I played on the college football team, came home again, took care of my brother for a couple of days while preparing, and I worked really hard in school. I did not have a free minute to play. The one thing I did not have time for was play. I had so much preparation and many little groups to lead.

I do not think I saw a TV program or anything for the longest period of time. A bunch of us were like this. I am not making myself out to be unique or the hero of the story. There were a bunch of us who were determined and diligent. We did not have a minute to waste from morning to night because I could not do school, play on the college football team, get home to see my brother, lead five small groups, teach two Bible studies every week, memorize the message in between, and have time to spare.

TAKE INITIATIVE

The good thing is that the message I preached at Missouri University, I also preached at Warrensburg at that university on the way back; so I used the same notes. That was nice. In essence, I want to say this: as a pastor, I have only asked people to be in leadership positions after they have taken initiative on their own without being asked for some years. I wait not for a month, but for two, three, or four years. I learned a long time ago that if you put a guy in a leadership position that has never taken initiative on his own, that guy would flounder in that leadership position.

Say, “Holy Spirit, tell me something. Give me a nudge. Should I reach out to a certain group of people—age, gender, race, particular felt need in Grandview, Overland Park, at IHOP–KC—or just give me a little something to aim at?” The Holy Spirit will give you something. He may help you. He may give you a burden to help the moms at IHOP–KC and to touch them. I do not mean just to serve them. Maybe you are going to minister to them in the Word, or prophetically. My point is to ask the Lord for a specific focus. It could be anything. There is no end. There are thousands of different ways that you could serve.

Now, this taking initiative is what separates the real leaders from the lazy daydreamers. Over the years, a lot of folks have said, “I am called to leadership.” Again, what is your vision?

They say, “Well, I am just called to be on the platform. I know it is going to be anointed. It is going to be awesome.”

I ask, “Is that all you know? What is your message?” People get enamored with the platform. They do not even have a vision. They say, “Oh, I am waiting.”

I answer, “No. Do not wait and wait. Start. Start, right now.” So if you teach, teach vigorously, even if it is just to three people. Do not wait for a crowd. Just wait for a little sense of a door. I do not mean wait for a door to open in ministry opportunities; I mean for the Holy Spirit to give you a little nudge. Now that I look back, it was totally blessed of the Lord, but back in those days, I did not know if it was right or wrong, but my leaders said to do it, so I did it.

Proverbs 13:4: “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.” The lazy man desires and has nothing. The dreamer dreams of leadership, ministry, but they do not do anything.

The diligent man “makes rich,” but that does not necessarily always mean that he has lots of money. He enters into the fullness of what God ordained for him—the diligent man—he takes risks.

A LEADER CANNOT BE A FEAR-DRIVEN PERSON

A leader cannot be a fear-driven person. One of the things most likely to stop a leader is fear. They might have fears, but they cannot be fear-driven. They take risks. If you aim at nothing; you get nothing. You have to take risks. Again, the risk may be reaching out at Grandview High School to start a Bible study, or doing an outreach—or some kind of ministry.

I use Bible study as the example because that is what I did for so many years. That was my ministry calling: as a teacher, I would disciple. So I am just speaking from my own experience. Do not limit it to my gifting, because I am talking just from my own experience and my particular gifting. You can think outside of the box. Why not touch Grandview High School while you are here as a full-time student with your Sacred Trust? You have time. I guarantee you have time. Again, you may not have time to play, but you have got time to do the rest. You can study. You can pray. You can minister, serve, and just collapse in your bed when you go to bed at night.

Start up the next day, and go hard. You have got to take risks. Now, again, the risks I am talking about are practical and small. I’m not talking about filling Arrowhead Stadium one day. It’s fine to do that as long as you are doing something little and practical between now and then.

There is a certain type of person who has such big visions—so big that no one could ever hold him accountable for doing it, and he thinks it will be done in thirty years. This type of person will not do anything between now and then. He thinks, “That vision is coming. You wait and see.” We have got to have something small and practical that we can get our hands on and that we can do today. Now, the Holy Spirit can correct our mistakes if we are moving forward. But nobody can steer a parked car. If the car is parked, it cannot be steered. It must be moving. The Holy Spirit will direct it. Do not be worried about making mistakes.

WHEN YOU MAKE A MISTAKE, PRESS DELETE AND START OVER

I have started a number of ministries that have fizzled out. I think, “Oh well! So what? Push delete; start a new one.” So what? Do not focus on opportunities that do not exist. Focus on the ones that do exist. Again, there are two or three high schools within five minutes of this place. There are nine college campuses in Kansas City, and there are two million people.

There are a lot of dead, lethargic believers who love Jesus, but they have lost their way. There are a lot of fiery ones too. You could revive the Church, win the lost, disciple people—etc. The numbers may only be three, four, five, or six, but when even two of you get together, you are in leadership. Maybe you are leading ten, but guess what? You really are in leadership and it is real.

FAITHFUL IN THE DAY OF SMALL BEGINNINGS

Be faithful in smallness. When the Lord said, “Do twenty-four hour prayer for sixteen years,” we had three little prayer meetings; but for most of the sixteen years, they were small. In October 1984, we had three—we were building for twenty-four seven prayer, and in many of the prayer meetings, we had ten or twenty people; some only had five or six. The big ones had about thirty.

It was funny. Some folks would visit and say, “I want to do one of these.”

I would say, “What do you mean?”

“I want to do a missions base.” They want to get a website and a poster, and start a missions base.

I say, “The building, the website, and the poster are the easy part. What’s hard is leading prayer meetings. I mean real prayer—have you ever led prayer meetings?”

They say, “Well, I led one a couple of years ago every Monday night for almost a year.”

I say, “That is not going to work. If you want to, and if you are called to lead a prayer ministry, start being diligent in prayer.”

ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE: OUR GREATEST PROMOTION IS IN THE AGE TO COME

The eternal perspective in leadership is critical. This seems like a small thing, but it is critical. We have two main assignments: one in this age, and one in the age to come. There is continuity between the two.

My ministry assignment in this age is dynamically related to my ministry assignment on the earth in the age to come.

We will really have a ministry assignment on the earth in the age to come. In the physical, material world, we will minister to people. It is related to what we are doing in this age. What we are doing in one decade leads to what we do in the next decade, but what we do in seventy years in this life leads to what we do in the age to come. It is not just a fanciful vision. It is real. Do tasks that need to be done. You do not have to start with a big, new idea. Do tasks that need to be done right now.

DO TASKS THAT NEED TO BE DONE

Look around practically and say, “Lord, give me a unique idea,” or, “Give me a burden for something that already exists.” Or, you can simply do the tasks that are in front of you without a burden. Just do them faithfully. I think of Joseph in Genesis 39. Joseph is, as you know, a teenage Jewish boy who is taken into slavery in Egypt. Potiphar buys him to make him a slave—a low-level slave in his house.

Potiphar is an Egyptian leader. He is one of Pharaoh’s officers, and this little Jewish boy, Joseph, is about eighteen or nineteen years old. He is on a very low level on the totem pole in terms of the protocol in that household. Of course, the blessing of God was on him. That is the divine part, but Joseph was also diligent—that is a human side. He started serving, and I guarantee you he started coming up with ideas of how to make this house better. It was not his house. He did not get any money for it.

He said, “I am going to make this thing better.”

Potiphar said, “Wow! Hey, young guy, why don’t I make you the head of the whole house? This is good.” Take hold of something that is not even necessarily your burden. It was not Joseph’s burden to be Potiphar’s main guy. That was not his life vision. He did not want to be in Potiphar’s house, but he was there anyway. He thought, “You know what? I’m going to serve. I’m going to see what happens.”

Well, some time goes by—another situation in his life arises, and he is in prison. He starts serving in the prison. I picture him. He is organizing this; he is helping with that. He is ministering to the guys and encouraging them.

The keeper of the prison said, “Hey young guy! You are good at this. Would you help me a little bit more?” Sooner or later, Joseph was over the whole prison.

People read the story and say, “Wow! That was God’s favor.”

But there is a human side. He was not sitting there, grouchy and lazy. It’s not as if God suddenly downloaded favor on Joseph, and he woke up with a golden key in his hand. No. He was serving. He was making the most of the situation at hand. The promotion came from that. He made himself indispensable—I do not mean—as believers, none of us are indispensable anyway.

LEADERS MAKE THEMSELVES INDISPENSABLE BY SERVING WITH A HAPPY SPIRIT

What I mean is: in a practical way, Joseph served so diligently and he served with such excellence that the keeper of the prison says, “I cannot really afford to go without you. I really need you because of your good spirit and your diligent work ethic—and you have good ideas.”

So he made himself indispensable in that secondary sense—because nobody is indispensable in the literal sense. Proverbs 18:16. “A man’s gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.” It will bring you before great men. Do not worry about promotion. Work diligently—just work, and doors will open. It may take decades for some to open their gifting with diligence and a good spirit. Diligence means you are working with zeal, but you have got a humble spirit as well—a teachable spirit.

PERSEVERE IN DIFFICULTY

A leader perseveres in difficulty. A leader does not quit. Now, they may have bad moods, and be tempted to quit, but in the big sense, they do not quit. Leadership is hard work. A lot of people quit in the face of pressure. The pressure of smallness: the outreach is so little for so many years. The smallness is so much pressure that they cannot bear it, so they quit. They cannot see God’s value for smallness. All they can see is the lack of numbers. You might only serve a handful of people, but who cares? They could not feel God’s pleasure over it. If you are touching five or ten people, God’s heart is happy over what you are doing. Well, for a lot of people, the pressure of smallness burns them out. They just cannot take it anymore.

Other people are not noticed. Being unnoticed is so much pressure. It makes them so angry and so hurt that they quit because of the pressure of not being noticed. Again, they need to connect with God in it, especially in the difficulty of the work. The work is hard; they have been mistreated, criticized, or passed up in promotion. Somebody else less qualified gets the promotion.

AS UNTO GOD

But if we connect with God and see His eyes looking at us, we can endure smallness and criticism, and we can endure being passed up. Our spirit is still happy. We are being set up for something far bigger down the road. It will not happen all in this age, but I tell you—down the road, you are going to be 860 years old. You will be on the other side. You will still be 800 years old. In the age to come, you will really care about your ministry and what you did on earth. You really will. The issue of quitting is what separates leaders from non-leaders. Leaders are dedicated.

They will spend decades sticking with their goal without losing focus, because it is not just a passing fad—or a conference ministry time when the man speaking at the conference said, “Let’s do this.” Everybody signs up for it, and a year later, they are not even connected to it.

LEADERS HAVE VISION

My point is: a leader has a vision. They are going to do something, and they are going to stick with it for decades. That’s what a leader is. Leadership is not a hundred yard dash. It is a marathon. Leadership is a marathon race. We need to persevere through the four seasons of life. Using the calendar, the seasons in the year: spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

WE PERSEVERE THROUGH ALL FOUR SEASONS OF LIFE

There is the springtime of your ministry where you are planting new things, starting those new little outreaches. They are small. Then there is the summer. It’s when that group of three grows to twenty—or to five. Here is the key: let the Lord determine the size. But summer is the time of growth. Then, the autumn comes and there is the harvest time. That is what everybody loves. Then, winter comes. Many things die, but the winter is as critical in the cycle as the other three seasons.

A lot of folks focus only on the autumn, the harvest, but your life is more than a harvest season. Your life has all four seasons in its cycles and rhythms, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. You have to stay with it for decades, not just for a short season. We do this as unto God. We have to serve with diligence.

A lot of people serve with diligence because the leaders over them are watching. This is quickest way to burn out. You have to stay enthusiastic when leaders are watching you and when leaders are not watching you—which is most of the time. It wears you out because you are not connected to God. You do not see His smile. You do not feel His gaze on you, or sense His pleasure in what you are doing. You are working hard to be noticed by somebody so you can finally get out of the drudgery of that small position. That’s a horrible way to do ministry. You are destined to end up with a wounded heart and a bad spirit. Leading or serving so you can be noticed is a recipe for disaster.

GOD’S EYES ARE ON YOU, AND HE WILL REWARD YOU FULLY

Be enthusiastic when nobody is looking. Colossians 3:23-24: “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” Paul said, “Do it knowing that God is looking. Do it heartily, or diligently, knowing God is looking at you, and knowing that God will reward you fully.”

The rewards will not happen until the age to come—the fullness of them—but God is watching today. That is the way we can be diligent in the day of smallness.

TEACHABLE SPIRIT

Leaders, we need to have a teachable spirit. Be easy to correct. Do not be defensive. Be easy to correct, because here’s the deal: the more you get promoted, the more criticism you will get. If you have a bigger platform—whether it’s a support system or in the market place—if you get a bigger platform, you will have more people criticizing you. You do not want to be taken out of the game every time you are criticized. You want to take criticism. This sounds clever, but it is real.

Criticism is a free research team. It really is. A guy comes to me and says, “You are off on this, that, and the other.” Maybe, there is ten percent of it that’s true. I did not have to pay the guy anything. It is a free research team. I take notes. I say, “Good, I will take that. That was a free lesson. It cost me nothing.” So what if he said it with a bad spirit and he exaggerated. Ten or fifteen percent was helpful. I did not have to go to school. I did not pay tuition. I did not have to take time. I got that for free in ten minutes. When a guy criticizes you, just stop. Instead of revving up and telling him how bad he is, try to find the ten percent. Work through the exaggerated wrong information and the bad spirit, but go ahead, get the ten percent, and run with it. Be a better person.

BE EASY TO CORRECT

It says in Proverbs 12:1: “Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge . . . he who hates correction is stupid.” Whoever loves instruction loves correction, as instruction means correction. They love knowledge. They want as much of the full picture as they can get. He who hates correction is stupid. Solomon, did you really write that? If a man throws off correction, he is throwing off free advice just because he does not like the manner in which it came. That’s stupid. Take it.

When I was younger, I was always excited about this. I used to teach this when I was pastoring in my twenties. I would encourage people, “If somebody corrects you, give him or her five dollars.” I did that a few times, and they became friends. They always took the five dollars. Then, I gave it to a couple of guys who were enemies and did not like me. They got mad at me when I gave them the five dollars, so I quit doing the five-dollar thing because it had insulted them.

I said, “Somebody corrects you with a bad spirit; just give them some money, and thank them.” I am not at all being humorous. I am being as absolutely serious as possible.

They are a free research team; it did not cost you a thing. You do not have to pay tuition, do not have any exams, and you get free insight.

Proverbs 13:18: “Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, but he who regards a rebuke will be honored.” At the end of the day, you will increase in what God gives you if you can hear a rebuke. You will be honored—not necessarily by the guy rebuking you—and maybe being honored is not the point. Sometimes it takes time, like over a decade. You will have much more honor if you will regard corrections. God will see to it.

TEAM PLAYER

A leader is a team player. I am just going to run through these because we are out of time. This is a very important one. Leaders serve for the good of others. I know we say that a lot, but it is real. I have talked to our leadership team; I said, “All these young people coming here—we have to be focused on how we can make them successful, not on how they can stay at IHOP–KC and make our departments strong.”

FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS

We have to figure out—or be preoccupied with finding out—what we can learn is the will of God for someone’s life and help them be successful in their calling. It does not matter if it is here, or there. This is something that is very important: if somebody is on your ministry, you are always helping him or her become more successful. What needs to happen to move them beyond your sphere of influence? If you can tap into that, you can have a happy spirit all the days of your ministry.

I know folks who get so hurt when somebody leaves their team to another team, or their ministry to another ministry. They are in pain and anguish; they are working through their hurt. Somewhere they got the idea that the guy or gal was theirs in a certain way. They did not have language for it, but when the person had a big opportunity somewhere else, they said “no.” When we control people, all kinds of unnecessary troubles happen. But if we see our ministry as a way to contribute to people’s success, and it is real—not just a preacher’s statement—we can have a free spirit all along the journey. It says in Proverbs 11:27: “He who earnestly seeks good finds favor.” This means to seek the good of others as well. If you are earnestly seeking good for the people on your ministry team, you will find favor. Proverbs 11:27 also warns that, “But trouble will come to him who seeks evil.” Again it may take ten years for it all to pan out, but the favor of God will be on you. The favor of man will be on you too if you are seeking their welfare and not for them to make your ministry department stronger, or your team—whatever.

OK. I am just going to take another couple of moments here. We are not going to finish the notes, but there are one or two more points.

TAKE LESS PRIVILEGE: FIRST IN AUTHORITY AND LAST IN PRIVILEGE

Take less privilege. One of the key principles in the New Testament is that those with greater authority must take less privilege. That is an absolute New Testament principle. Notice here, 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.”

God appointed apostles first. Apostles have the first in authority. Look at 1 Corinthians 4:9: God displayed apostles last. Well, are they first, or are they last? Well they are first in authority, but they are last in privilege. That is a big principle. If you have more spiritual authority, you should bear more spiritual criticism, work more diligently, give away the most money, and have the least privilege of everybody that you are working with in terms of that ministry organization. Now there is proportion to it. I do not want to go into that right now, but my point is if you get more authority, you should set your heart to have less privilege.

The bigger your ministry becomes, the less privilege you have, actually. That is an important thing. If you get more authority and you take more money, everything under you will eventually be broken in your ministry. Not everything, but many things will be broken. If you have more authority and you demand more honor, things will be broken in your community, or in that ministry department. The higher the authority, the less the privilege—that is just a biblical principle.

It says simply that God has a plan for every one of us. Ask Him what the plan is. You can ask God, “Give me a little tip off. There are high schools. There are colleges. There is market place. There are neighborhoods. There are all kinds of groups of people. Give me five, ten, twenty, 500, or 5,000 whatever the number is. Give me a little nudge. Give me clarity on the inside to go after somebody.” Ask Him, and He will give you insight.

Start prayer meetings. There are prayer meetings to be started in every high school, college, and market place. Maybe you work at IHOP–KC as your primary assignment, and you are down at the market place helping another person lead a prayer meeting, or the high school. Well how do you get in the high school? Ask the Holy Spirit. You will figure out a way. If you refuse to be denied, you will get in that high school somehow.

HOW TO DISCIPLE IN A SIMPLE MODEL

Start helping outreaches. Again, they do not have to be on the organizational chart of the church that you are a part of. Just go start a ministry. Just a little outreach with maybe three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty people.

Disciple young believers: this is something that the people in my Presbyterian church all did, and we were all taught how. It was a very, very simple model of discipling. It was quite effective. A lot of good things happened. We would find a book. They did this to me a number of times; then a few years later, I did it to others. I found a book that inspired me. I would get five people, younger believers, and I would give them that book.

I would say, “We are going to read chapter one and two this week, and when we meet next Saturday morning, we are going to discuss the book.” When we would do it, all kinds of things would happen in discussion. I disciplined them; I helped them in so many ways.

Now my spiritual knowledge when I was seventeen or eighteen was not mature, but I was meeting with fifteen-year-old high school students. I would simply—they would read it, and I would read it. We would talk about it for an hour; then I would ask them about the issues of their personal life. How are you? What do you do with your time? Your money?

I do not mean controlling them. But asking them if their money and what they were doing in their free time was actually backing up their life vision? I had them all write down their life vision because the guy over me told me to write my life vision down. I just did what the guy over me told me to do. I did it to these young people.

THE POWER OF A FOCUSED LIFE

I have a series called *The Power of a Focused Life*. It talks about a vision for your financial life, ministry life, physical life, family life, and you just write down a few little points. We would talk about those and the book. That was it. All kinds of situations arose, and I would disciple three or four young guys. I had several when I was in college; I had four or five different groups like that. That were three, four, or five groups, and it was exciting. I did that for years. Someone said, “Go disciple somebody,” so we did it. That is all we knew. That is what it meant to us.

Go get a book. Read it with the guy; when you get finished with the book in your groups of three or four people, have all kinds of lively discussions. You would aim for people who are younger in the Lord than you. We would ask them about those practical issues of their life. We would pray for each other, and go to Dairy Queen afterwards or something. You know you could disciple three or four people at school. Maybe you are a third-year student, and they are eighteen years old and just came here. Just ask them, “Hey, do you want to be in a personal Bible study?”

You do not even have to call it discipleship. It is called a Bible study, but your goal is you want to disciple them in the best you can for a year. It really will change your life and their lives.

SERVE IN PRACTICAL WAYS

Then just serve in practical ways. It does not always have to be traditional ministry. All the support systems get involved in leading them. Do not wait for somebody to lead you. Get involved in the support systems, and say “Hey! I will help lead. I will help organize it. I will help you with it.” I tell you they will all appreciate it.

The last thing I will say is this: if you start a ministry, and you have got five or ten people working on it, you won’t really recruit anybody through announcements. I have seen people over these past thirty years ask if they can announce that their ministry will be started.

I respond, “I have really bad news for you: if I announce it to 3,000 people”—that is, our church was that number for many years, though we have about 4,000 here—“if I announce it, you will get three people from an announcement to 4,000 people. That is not how people are recruited. They are recruited one by one. If you want to get people in a ministry you have got to talk to them one by one, and when they see you are committed, you have clarity, and you have a teachable spirit, they will follow your lead.”

You are going to be working longer hours than they will, and you have passion about it, so they will join you. They are not going to join you by an announcement. So this goes against the traditional mindset of trying to get an announcement on Sunday, and suddenly, you will have a ministry born. No. Throw the announcement concept out. We are happy to announce it, but you will get three out of 4,000. When they see that you are clear, you are diligent, you are going to work harder than they are, you are going to pour yourself out with a teachable, open spirit, you are going to affirm and encourage them, they will say, “We are just looking for somebody to follow.” I do not mean just to follow mindlessly. “We are looking for something to do. We are looking for somebody with a little bit of zeal and confidence about it. We will jump in and help them.” Be that person. Are you the kind of leader you would follow? Are you the kind of leader who’s clear enough and committed enough so people want to follow? I am talking five, or ten people; I am not talking about 5,000 people.

MINISTRY TIME

Amen. You can read the rest on your own. Lead diligently and take initiative. Let’s stand. I went too long tonight because I told you too many stories about high school and Dairy Queen, but the reason is that I want you to do that. Do not be stopped. Do not let money or locked doors stop you. Just do not let anything stop you. There is a way for that door to open—done in a righteous way, I mean.