



**SCANNING
YOUR
DASHBOARD
WARNING LIGHTS
& HOLY HABITS**

==== *for* ====

A LEADER'S SOUL

R O W L A N D F O R M A N

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Caring for Your Own Soul

Effective leaders care deeply for the souls of others. Yet this often comes at the expense of their own soul's well-being—and sometimes that of their family as well.

Scanning Your Dashboard invites you to regularly attend to your inner life. Just as a driver watches the dashboard for warning lights and fuel levels, wise leaders learn to notice what is happening beneath the surface of their lives.

Each **Dashboard Indicator** in this mentoring resource pairs a Warning Light with a Holy Habit—helping you not only to recognize areas of vulnerability, but also to respond with practices that cultivate a healthy, Christ-dependent life.

Dashboard Indicators

A dashboard doesn't only warn you when something is wrong—it also reassures you when things are functioning as they should. In the same way, these indicators are designed to help you discern both the warning signs that need attention and the habits that sustain a healthy Christ-centered life.

As you work through Warning Light 1 and Holy Habit 1, take a moment to reflect. Over the past six months, have you been gradually drifting from your first love for Christ, or intentionally cultivating a close abiding relationship with him?

In each of the seven letters to the Churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3), Jesus repeats this invitation: *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches* (Revelation 2:7).

Begin by processing Warning Light 1 and Holy Habit 1 on your own. Then, if possible, meet with a mentor-friend or small group, to share what the Holy Spirit is bringing to your attention.

Working with Warning Lights and then Holy Habits together, helps you not only to see what you need to work on, but to step into a grace-filled

Dashboard Indicator #1:

Are You Drifting, or Abiding in Christ?

WARNING LIGHT #1:

DRIFTING: *Am I Trading Performance for Intimacy with Christ?*

Drifting from Christ rarely begins with rebellion. More often, it begins with success. Ministry continues. Responsibilities grow. Fruit appears. Yet somewhere along the way, intimacy with Christ is quietly replaced by activity for Christ.

So, let me ask you plainly: over the past six months, have you been close to Christ—or merely busy for him? Has performance for Christ become a substitute for a deeper knowledge of Christ? Are you depending on him moment by moment, or only crying out to him when you reach crisis point?

More importantly, what would Jesus say about your relationship with him at present—not your ministry, but your nearness to him? Would he say that you are abiding in him, staying close and dependent, or that you are mostly disconnected and distant?

How does this distance from Christ take place? It rarely announces itself through blatant disobedience. Like other warning signs, it's often a gradual shift—from feeling close to Christ to slowly engaging with him less.

Pause for a moment and reflect on some of Jesus' final words to his disciples before he was crucified:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

- Are you disconnected from the “vine” – the true source of your strength?
- Are you doing the work of Christ while neglecting communion with Christ?
- Are you serving Christ as if he said, “You can do most things on your own—just check in on me occasionally?”

What is the solution to the warning lights of pride, prayerlessness, fatigue, impurity, isolation, and inauthenticity? It is not trying harder or performing with greater precision. It is restored closeness to Christ. The answer is not striving; it is abiding in Christ daily.

Take note of this warning light. It says:

**“Pull over. Rekindle the flame of your love for Christ.
Stop trying to drive on empty.”**

Reflect & Discuss:

1. When you think about the past six months, would you describe your relationship with Christ as close, drifting, or distant? What has most shaped that reality?
2. In what ways might activity for Christ be crowding out intimacy with Christ in your life right now?
3. Jesus says that “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). How does that verse challenge the way you currently approach your leadership, work, or ministry?
4. What are some early signs that you are operating on “performance” rather than “dependence”?
5. What would it look like this week—not to try harder—but to simply abide more intentionally in Christ?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I confess how easily I substitute activity for intimacy, and performance for dependence. I thank you that you do not shame me for drifting but gently invite me back to yourself. Forgive me for trying to bear fruit apart from you. Teach me again what it means to abide—to stay close, to listen, to depend on you moment by moment.

Rekindle my love for you. Restore my joy in you. And may whatever fruit comes from my life flow not from striving, but from remaining in you.

Amen

HOLY HABIT #1:

ABIDING: *Depending on Christ Daily*

How can holy habits like humility, purity, and integrity become part of our everyday lives?

My first reaction to that question was simply: *This is beyond me!*

What is your response? Do you ever feel too inadequate to live like this consistently? Do you wonder if lasting Christlike character is even possible?

Jesus gently reminds us all, using the same words that he spoke to his disciples,

Without me you can do nothing! (John 15:5).

“Nothing, Lord?” “Yes ... not one thing to produce the fruit of an attractive Christlike life: fruit such as kindness, joyfulness and love”

Jesus spoke these words using the metaphor of a grapevine bearing luscious fruit at harvest time.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes.

(John 15:1-2)

If you’ve ever seen grapevines pruned in winter, you know it isn’t a pretty sight. The branches look bare, even lifeless. But pruning is not destruction—it’s preparation. It’s the only way to produce an abundant harvest.

Has the all-wise Gardener lovingly pruned you lately?

It’s a reminder that God is the One producing the fruit.

So, what is our part? We cannot manufacture the fruit of Christlike character. But we can abide.

One of my life verses captures it perfectly:

If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

(John 15:7)

This verse makes it clear that fruitfulness depends upon our practicing the following three habits:

Stay Connected to Christ

The recurring phrase in John 15:1-17 is: ***remain in***. It means stay connected to, abide or make your home in.

Holy habits grow only as we stay close to Christ, interacting with him not just weekly, but daily ... even hourly.

Have you gone quiet on him lately? Do you acknowledge him before you even roll out of bed? Do you talk with him and listen to him throughout your day?

Stay Connected to His Word

Jesus adds: ... and ***my words remain in you*** ... His words are meant to find a home in us. We read them, meditate on them, and slowly, imperfectly, yet purposely align our lives to them.

That's what I love about the YouVersion Bible app. It helps you to stay in God's Word, until God's Word stays in you—to turn verses over in your mind, until your thoughts are saturated with Scripture.

Stay on Your Knees in Prayer

The outcome of abiding in Christ and his Word is prayer:

... ask whatever you wish ...

This fits so beautifully with Habit #2: praying as a way of life. As God's Word reshapes your desires, your prayers become less self-oriented and more Spirit-led.

You talk to Christ about your schedule. You bring him your burdens. You seek his help in small crises and quiet decisions.

Abiding turns ordinary moments into holy dependence on Christ.

Much Fruit

What happens through God's pruning, and our abiding? Jesus says we will bear ***much fruit***. Not forced fruit. Not performance-based fruit. But Spirit-produced fruit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

And that is the goal of these two parallel plans: **7 Warning Lights** and **7 Holy Habits**—an abundant life to God's glory.

Reflect & Discuss:

1. What might it look like for you to “abide in Christ” in the ordinary moments of life this week?
2. Has God been pruning anything in your life recently? How have you responded?
3. What does it look like to practice what Jesus meant by *If ... my words remain in you* (John 15:7)?
4. As you reflect on Warning Light #1 and Holy Habit #1, what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? What steps will you take?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus,

I confess that without You I can do nothing of lasting spiritual value. I cannot manufacture humility, purity, integrity, or love through effort alone.

Teach me to abide in You. Keep me close.

Let Your words find a home in me and reshape my thoughts and desires.

Heavenly Father, when You prune me, give me trust instead of resistance.

Produce in me the fruit that brings glory to You—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control.

Today, I choose dependence over striving. Help me remain in You, Lord.

Amen.

Dashboard Indicator #2

Are you Praying Less, or Praying More?

WARNING LIGHT #2.

PRAYERLESSNESS: *Am I too Distracted to Pray?*

This devotional is not an invitation to guilt, but to grace. Most sincere believers, when asked, “How’s your prayer life?” instinctively reply, “Not what it should be.” Rather than scolding ourselves or one another, a better question might be: “How can we help each other adopt prayer not as a duty, but as a way of life?”

Why is prayerlessness so prevalent? Warning Lights #1 and #2 travel together. Pride is the attitude; prayerlessness is the behavior that flows from it. Warning Light #1 asks, “Have I become too big for my boots?” This second danger signal asks, “Why have I stopped kneeling and substituted it with distracted busyness?”

At heart, prayerlessness is a subtle rewriting of Proverbs 3:5. Instead of *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding*, we live as if it says, “Lean on your own understanding first—and if all else fails, pray.”

Three biblical stories underline why prayerlessness is such a danger signal, particularly for leaders, but ultimately for all of us.

1 Samuel 13:5-14.

King Saul failed to inquire of the LORD during a critical confrontation with the Philistines. Impatient and pressured, he took matters into his own hands and offered the burnt offering himself—acting as a priest when he had no right to. Leaders must make decisions, often under pressure. When prayer is absent, we become vulnerable, like Saul, to making very unwise and very prideful choices.

Prayerlessness fosters prideful decisions.

Luke 22:39-46

In the Olive Grove at Gethsemane, Jesus twice urged three of his closest leaders-in-training, Peter, James, and John, to stay alert and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. Overwhelmed with sadness, they slept instead.

They didn't grasp how needy they were, and when temptation came, they failed.

The contrast between them and the holy Son of God, could not be more vivid. His entire life was marked by dependent prayer, and here, fully aware that the Cup meant bearing the sin of the world, he prayed and surrendered himself to his Father's will. Cyprian (c. 200-258) observed, "If he prayed who was without sin, how much more it becometh a sinner to pray."

Failing to pray opens temptation's door.

Mark 9:14-29

In Mark 9, the disciples attempted to heal a boy tormented by an unclean spirit, relying on skills that had worked before. Nothing happened. The father was disappointed; the disciples were perplexed. When they ask Jesus why they had failed, his answer became a life-defining lesson: *This kind can be cast out only by prayer*. That is certainly true when facing the impossible, but it is also true of everyday life.

How do we lead a vibrant growing church? Only by prayer.

How do we grow a family to God's glory? Only by prayer.

How do we maintain a close walk with God daily? Only by prayer.

When prayer is neglected, self-reliance goes into overdrive

Reflect and Discuss

1. When you hear the term "prayerlessness" what is your response?
2. How does distracted busyness relate to less prayer in your life?
3. With which of the three examples of prayerlessness (1 Samuel 13, Luke 22, and Mark 9) do you most identify? Why?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I confess how easily prayer slips from the center of my life. Forgive me for leaning on my own understanding and turning to you only when I'm overwhelmed and desperate. Awaken in me a deeper awareness of my need for you and draw me to a life of prayer. I place myself in your hands. Without you I can do nothing. Amen

HOLY HABIT #2:

DEPENDENCE: *Praying as Your Way of Life*

If your desire as a Christian leader is to be more like Jesus, then nothing will shape you more deeply than a life of prayer.

Why? Because to be like Jesus is to live dependently. And Jesus' dependence upon his Father was expressed constantly through prayer.

Luke peppers his Gospel with glimpses of Jesus at prayer. He opens a window into his prayer-shaped life:

As he was praying heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him ...
(Luke 3:21-22)

In prayer, Jesus was affirmed by the Father and empowered by the Spirit. And this was no isolated moment. After healing many, Luke adds: *Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed* (Luke 5:16).

He chose his disciples after a night of prayer (Luke 6:12). On the eve of his crucifixion, he withdrew to Gethsemane with three trusted friends and prayed (Luke 22:39-45).

If Jesus—the holy Son of God—lived this way, how much more must I cultivate this habit of dependence?

Jesus' life was so saturated with prayer that one day, while he was praying, one of the Twelve asked him, *Lord, teach us to pray ...* (Luke 11:1). His request reminds us that prayer is not just instinctive; it is learned. In response, Jesus gave them two anchors for a life of dependence.

Firstly, he offered a model prayer, which we know of as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer begins by exalting God's name and kingdom, then moves on to making request for daily needs, forgiveness and protection.

Secondly, he urged them to ask and keep on asking, because prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of his highest willingness.

If prayer is to become a holy habit, it helps to begin with small, life-giving practices—many of them modeled by leaders in Scripture. I've found these helpful to make my prayer life more intentional.

Practices that May Become Habits:

Meditative Prayers. As you open your Bible each day, pause at each verse and turn it into a spoken or written prayer. It's like praying God's thoughts back to him.

Spontaneous Prayers. Simply pray as things happen. Rather than fretting because your mind is distracted every time you pray, turn each of those cares into prayers. If, like David, you are deeply anxious, as in Psalm 55:3, turn to Jesus who knows all about that (Hebrews 5:7). If you've been betrayed by your best friend (Psalm 55:12-16) turn to Jesus who understands all about betrayal. *Cast your burden on the LORD and he will sustain you ...* (Psalm 55:22).

Periodic Prayers. Pray before, during, and after each daily event. For example, if you've scheduled a mentoring session, ask God for a sense of his presence as you travel to it. During the meeting, send a quick prayer to heaven, expecting God to give you the answer. Nehemiah set us this example when he needed the right words to say to a pagan king. (Nehemiah 2:2-5). After your time together, thank God for the wisdom he gave you.

Scheduled Prayers. Like Jesus, choose a private spot or quiet place to meet with your Heavenly Father. Like David, schedule a time each morning to bring your requests before God (Psalm 5:3, 55:17), stop what you are doing at noon to send prayers to heaven, and pause every evening to review the day. Daniel was a great role model of this practice (Daniel 6:10). These practices are not prayer-duties. They are gentle pathways—ways of moving slowly to a life where prayer becomes as natural as breathing: a holy habit of dependence. Maybe try one of these practices this week.

Reflect & Discuss:

1. When you think about Jesus praying so often, what does it reveal to you about his life of dependence on the Father?
2. Which kind of prayer comes most naturally to you right now: meditative, free, routine, or scheduled? Which feels hardest?
3. What is one moment in your daily leadership rhythm where you could simply "send a quick prayer to heaven," like Nehemiah?
4. As you reflect on Warning Light #2 and Holy Habit #2, what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? What steps will you take?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for showing me what a life of dependence looks like. Teach me to pray—not as a duty, but as a habit of closeness with the Father. When I feel anxious, distracted, or empty, remind me that I can turn to You.

May my prayers become as natural as breathing—a quiet pathway back to Your presence throughout my day. I want to live more like You. Form this holy habit in me I pray. Amen.

Dashboard Indicator #3

Are You Proudful, or Humbly Serving Others?

WARNING LIGHT #3

PRIDE: *Am I too Big for My Boots?*

Pride is elusive. It's far easier to spot in others than in ourselves. Just when you think you're humble, pride sneaks up again—like the case of the pastor whose congregation gave him a badge for being humble and then took it away because he wore it!

Leaders who have lived a lifetime of relative humility can still stumble into pride as they near the finish line. That's why 2 Chronicles 26:15-16 needs to be etched on the mind of every leader:

"... he was greatly helped until he became powerful. But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall."

King Uzziah enjoyed 52 years of wise and creative leadership. Then one day he presumptuously entered the Temple and acted as though he were a priest. Was it not enough for him that he was a king? At that moment, leprosy broke out on his forehead. He lived as a leper until the day of his death.

John Stott, the esteemed pastor and author observed,

"At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend."

Why is pridefulness so dangerous—for leaders and for all of us? Proverbs 16:18 warns that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. 1 Peter 5:5-6 intensifies the warning: that God actively opposes the proud but pours grace into the humble.

So how might pride be showing up in you? Here are some indicators to be aware of:

- You don't think you are prideful. Maybe others—but not you!
- You talk more than you listen.

- You fish for compliments and feel deflated when affirmation doesn't come.

Is the warning light of pride blinking on your character dashboard? One of the clearest signs may be what is happening—or not happening—in your prayer life. When prayer shrinks, self-reliance grows. What steps could you take to return to humble dependence before pride hardens in your heart?

Reflect & Discuss:

1. Would those closest to you describe you as humble or prideful? What evidence might they point to?
2. More importantly, how do you think God would describe your current posture—self-reliance or humble dependence?
3. Which of these three pride indicators resonated most with you?
 - Thinking you don't struggle with pride.
 - Talking more than listening.
 - Fishing for compliments

Prayer:

Gracious and holy God, you dwell with the lowly and revive the contrite in heart. Search my heart and show me where pride has taken root in my words and motives. Teach me again to listen, and depend, and pray. Clothe me with humility so that I will finish well by your grace. Amen

HOLY HABIT #3:

HUMILITY: *Becoming More Like Jesus*

We are all infected with pride, to a greater or lesser degree. I know I am. How then can we become like Jesus, the “gentle and lowly” one (Matthew 11:30)?

Humility is elusive! It comes and goes when we least expect it. Just when you think you’ve reached a state of humility, a prideful attitude is very likely to pop up. Like King Uzziah, we may be relatively humble most of the time and be tripped up by pride as the curtain is about to go down on our lives (2 Chronicles 26:3-5; 16-22).

How long might it take to cultivate a habit of humility? The popular rule of three weeks is too short. Several studies suggest it can take around three months to embed a complex habit like humility. In my case it feels more like a lifetime! The 7 Holy Habits in this devotional plan can be embedded into our character and behaviors through a series of practices.

Scripture gives us several glimpses into what humility looks like. Consider these three metaphors: serving others, washing feet, and climbing down.

Serving others

Waiters in a café for example, are there not to be served, but to serve. When Jesus’ 12 disciples were quarreling about who was the greatest, he said that their rulers lorded it over them, but if they wanted to be great they must become servants, *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:43-45).

The following practices are not rules to follow, but postures to try—simple experiments that over time, may shape humility in you:

Practices that May Become Habits:

- When you meet leadership team members (or family members), pause and ask yourself— “How might I serve this person?”
- If an opportunity presents itself, choose a quiet or unseen way to serve, especially when no one will know.

Washing Feet

In the Upper Room, before Jesus made his way to his crucifixion, despite being infinitely greater than every one of his Twelve disciples, he stooped down and washed their dirty feet. This included the feet of Judas who would betray him, and Peter who would deny him (John 13:1-17). What humility! Such grace!

In some cultures, to this day, literal foot washing is still appropriate. For the rest of us, finding ways to do the least enviable, but most refreshing acts of service, is a way in which we can wash one another's feet.

Practices that May Become Habits:

- Look for ways to encourage those you lead, especially if you find them difficult or draining.
- Practice one of the biblical one-anothers, such as praying, forgiving, or encouraging, as intentional acts of "foot-washing."

Climbing Down

We live in a world where people try to climb the leadership ladder. In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul challenges people to be like Jesus who climbed down to serve others. He describes Jesus' steps downward: *He emptied himself vv.6-7*—although he was God, he became one of us and served us. *He humbled himself v.8*—By dying for us on the Cross.

Practices that May Become Habits:

- Notice when your position, title, or reputation influences how you relate to others, and lay them aside when they get in the way of loving service.
- Choose a less prominent place or role as a way of reminding yourself that your security comes from God, not status.

Jesus' Twelve argued among themselves as to who was the greatest. He showed them how to descend into greatness by serving as a humble waiter, encouraging those he led by washing their feet, and climbing down in the sure knowledge that God would exalt him.

Reflect & Discuss:

1. Which of these three metaphors—serving like a waiter, washing feet, or climbing down—most challenges you right now?
2. Where might pride be quietly shaping your leadership decisions or relationships?
3. Which of the suggested “practices that may become habits” could you implement this week?
4. As you reflect on Warning Light #3 and Holy Habit #3, what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? What steps will you take?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, gentle and lowly in heart, I confess that pride still finds a home in me. I want to be seen, affirmed and respected, sometimes more than I want to serve. Teach me the way of humility. Help me to notice where I cling to position. Give me eyes to see simple opportunities to serve. Make me gentler and lowlier like you. I trust you to shape me and lift me up in your time. Amen.

Dashboard Indicator #4

Are You Running on Empty, or Learning Unforced Rhythms of Grace?

WARNING LIGHT #4

FATIGUE: *Am I Running on Empty?*

When mentoring leaders, my first question is usually, “How are you?” Most respond automatically, “Fine.”

I sometimes follow up with a second question, “How are you really?” That’s when some pause, look down, and quietly say, “Tired.”

When invited to say more, they describe emotional exhaustion and the effort it takes to project that all is well, while inwardly feeling dull and dry. Some stare blankly at the screen during sermon preparation. Others lie awake at night, fearing they may have reached the end of their rope—sometimes wishing they could simply fly away from it all.

How are you really? Is the warning signal of fatigue blinking on the dashboard of your life? There can be a satisfied tiredness at the end of work well done. But there can also be a debilitating tiredness. If you find yourself experiencing the latter, then allow this third warning light to help you pause and recalibrate. In some cases, even a medical checkup may be wise.

If it’s sheer exhaustion through ministry, or life’s stresses and strains, you’re in good company. Faced with the complexity of leading a nation and a relentless barrage of complaints, Moses had had enough. He told Yahweh that he couldn’t carry all these people alone, and that the burden was too heavy for him. In sheer exhaustion, he overstated his case to God: *If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness* (Numbers 11:15).

Elijah is another Bible character who wanted to give up. After a resounding victory over the prophets of Baal, he expected the whole nation to return to the LORD. They didn’t and Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him. He was petrified. Like Forest Gump, he ran—and kept on running. Exhausted, he sat under a broom tree and prayed that he would die. Like Moses, he’d had enough.

Moses' exhaustion came from carrying too much for too long. Elijah's came after giving everything he had. There are rhythms that help leaders from burning out.

One way to discern what kind of fatigue you are carrying is to think in terms of capacity rather than commitment. Commitment asks, "Am I willing?" Capacity asks, "Am I able?"

How are you treating the one body God gave you? Do you have adequate sleep? Is exercise part of your weekly routine? Do you have a balanced diet? Do you have times when you rest or are you working 24/7? How often do you use the word "tired" when asked, "How are you?"

Are you willing to pause and take fatigue seriously? Or will you push through it and try harder? It's human to run harder when we have lost our way.

In Isaiah 30:15-16, the Lord describes this very thing in the following words to his rebellious people:

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says:

*"In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it.*

¹⁶You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.'

Therefore you will flee!

You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.'

Therefore your pursuers will be swift!

Fatigue is not a failure of faith, but a warning signal that calls for repentance and rest, and quiet reflection on what God may be inviting you to stop or change.

Reflect & Discuss:

1. Which description of fatigue in this devotional resonated most with you?
2. How do you distinguish between *satisfied* tiredness and *debilitating* tiredness in your own life?
3. What might repentance and rest look like for you in this season?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you know me through and through. You were tested in every way and understand tiredness. I confess my tendency to push through exhaustion and ignore the warning signs you graciously provide. When I am on overload, grant me repentance and rest. I receive again your invitation to come to you in my weariness and find rest for my soul in you alone. Amen

HOLY HABIT #4:

RHYTHMS: *Learning When to Engage and When to Disengage.*

Fatigue is not a flaw. It's a signal. Warning Light #4 exposed the danger of running on empty: serving faithfully while slowly being sapped of strength and joy.

Burnout is rarely a crash. More often, it is a slow leak. How can we avoid debilitating exhaustion?

Jesus provides a pathway in Matthew 11:29-30: ... *learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

This way of Jesus sounds deeply attractive to me—soul rest and light burdens. Consider these snapshots into how Jesus lived:

Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. (Mark 6:31)

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:15-16)

Jesus ... withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (John 6:15)

When we learn from him, we uncover his sacred rhythms: serving, withdrawing, resting, praying, then re-engaging. The life of Jesus was not hurried, it was rhythmic. Within a day, or a week, Jesus exemplified the Sabbath principle. Some call the practice of Sabbath 'six and one': six days of work then a literal day of rest. I respect that view. Even more, I like the idea of a Sabbath pause, when one retreats *within* a hectic day. I have found that taking a Sabbath interlude of ten minutes, an hour, or an evening pause of solitude and prayer—is both doable and deeply restorative.

Once a month I take a Sabbath day. This provides a nice reflective rhythm—an opportunity for me to drive to my "lonely place," and process what God has been doing in and through me over the last month. Might you consider that practice?

The Sabbath way is not endless output. It is the rhythm of working well, then ceasing, resting, and celebrating.

- **Ceasing** from whatever is work for us.
- **Resting** as an act of trust—physically, as in taking a nap, or relationally, such as withdrawing from people for a time of solitude, or spiritually, for example going on a prayer walk.
- **Celebrating** God’s goodness with gratitude through creation, music, friendship, or food.

These are not rules. They are invitations to whole-of-life health. It's human to be tired. Moses’ uplifted hands grew weary in prayer. (Exodus 17:12). Young people grow tired and weary (Isaiah 40:30). Jesus was tired from his journey (John 4:6).

The issue isn’t tiredness. It is working to the point of exhaustion, and ignoring the life-giving rhythms God has graciously put in place.

So, engage fully in the work God has entrusted to you in this season. Then disengage meaningfully: cease, rest and celebrate.

This is the holy habit of God-given rhythms.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you that your way brings rest. Too often I’ve pushed past my limits and ignored healthy rhythms. Teach me when to engage in service, and when to withdraw to replenish my soul. Help me to cease, rest, and celebrate your goodness. Restore my soul today and lead me into your unhurried pace. Amen.

Reflect & Discuss

1. When leaders are fatigued, what might it signal?
2. Which of these life rhythms do you tend to ignore: ceasing, withdrawing, resting, and celebrating? Why?
3. What might a “Sabbath pause” look like for you this week?
4. As you reflect on Warning Light #4 and Holy Habit #4, what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? What steps will you take?

Dashboard Indicator #5

Are You Slipping Morally, or Guarding Your Heart?

WARNING LIGHT #5:

IMPURITY: *Am I Spying on Greener Grass?*

My first working title for this warning light was *immorality*. I've chosen instead the word *impurity*, because impurity describes the root, while immorality describes the fruit. Long before outward failure, there is often an initial glance—a quiet looking over the fence—that if left unchecked, can lead to tragic consequences.

Impurity is a heart issue.

Proverbs 4:23 is an essential starting point as we grapple with questions like, “Why has this sinful behavior just happened?”

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Above all else ... This is the top priority. Nothing else comes close. Moral vigilance isn't paranoia; it is the way of wisdom.

... guard your heart ... Watch out! Pay attention to warning signals. Be alert to any moral slippage and take preventive action.

... for everything you do flows from it. You are the keeper of the stream. Left unattended, it can pollute everything downstream. Carefully guarded, it becomes a source of life in every relationship—as pure a stream, as a ransomed sinner can be.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus may have had Proverbs 4:23 in mind:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28).

The Pharisees, whom Jesus refers to as hypocrites, put all the emphasis on external behavior. To them adultery meant the physical act of having sex with anyone who is not your spouse. Jesus upheld the Seventh Commandment—

You shall not commit adultery—but raised the bar. Desire, he said, or a sideways glance that may become a repeated stare, precedes the physical act.

... in his heart. Jesus taught that lusting after or coveting what doesn't belong to us (the Tenth Commandment) is a heart issue. It includes adultery but it is deeper than that.

What is your “greener grass”? If you initially looked over the fence casually, what did you spy that doesn't belong to you? Has that casual glance become something with a vice-like grip on your heart? Are you desiring what God has not entrusted to you?

Nowhere in Scripture is this sad progression—from a glance to a tragic fall—more vividly portrayed than in 2 Samuel 11. In the preceding chapters, David is enjoying extraordinary success. God has given him victory, rest from his enemies, and a covenant that will last forever.

Then comes the tipping point: 2 Samuel 11:1-5. At the time when kings went off to war, David stayed in Jerusalem. From his balcony he saw Bathsheba bathing. One glance became desire; desire turned into an adulterous act, adultery cascaded into deceit, abuse of power, and even the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband.

Why did this happen? Not because David was ignorant of God's law, but because he failed to guard his heart. Later, in deep repentance, he would cry out, *Create in me a clean heart, O God* (Psalm 51:10). David knew where the real problem lay.

David's story is included to alert us and invite us to examine our own hearts before a glance becomes a fall.

There is hope. But before exploring solutions, please take this heart-check. Let the Holy Spirit do the work of conviction that leads to repentance and restoration.

Reflect and Discuss:

1. What do you understand to be the difference between impurity of heart and immorality of behavior?
2. What might “greener grass” represent for you—not just sexually, but in terms of desire or coveting?
3. Where do you see the danger of small, unchecked glances becoming larger compromises?
4. How does David’s story both warn you and give you hope?

Prayer:

Holy and merciful God, You see not only my actions, but my heart. I confess how easily my desires wander and how casually I sometimes look over fences You never intended me to cross. Search me and know my heart. Show me where impurity has taken root. Create in me clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Teach me to guard what matters most, and to desire what you desire for me. Lead me in the way of purity, not out of fear, but by love and grace.

Amen.

HOLY HABIT #5:

PURITY: *Guarding Your Heart*

Maintaining purity is challenging, but possible. And it begins with prayer.

Maybe an expansive prayer like, “Lord, make me as holy as a ransomed sinner can be” or a series of smaller expressions of dependence on God throughout the day.

If the goal is to become more like Jesus, it’s comforting to know that Jesus was:

... tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.
(Hebrews 4:15).

After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by the Evil One—to indulge himself by turning stones into bread, to show off by throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple, and to turn aside from the Cross by bowing down to Satan.
(Matthew 4:1-11).

Each time he repulsed temptation by quoting Scripture.

Jesus is alongside you when impure thoughts assail you, and his Word is still the Spirit’s sword to win the battle of the mind.

To the intensely religious people of his day—those proud that they hadn’t physically broken the seventh commandment, Jesus said

... anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

Jesus taught that the solution to sexual impurity is not external, because the cause is not external.

It is a heart issue.

When one of the Early Church Fathers, Anthony, was overwhelmed with lust, he separated himself from society to live as a hermit in Egypt. He later admitted,
“I discovered Satan could easily find me in the desert.”

So how do we deal with this heart issue?

First, we need to pray.

Pray an expansive and expectant prayer such as: *Create in me a clean heart O God!* (Psalm 51:10).

And pray urgent prayers too—Scripture-based prayers that confront sinful thoughts immediately. Because our hearts can be deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), we also need frequent prayers of confession.

John the Apostle reminds us:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9).

All of us, however saintly we may appear, need tender hearts that keep short accounts with God.

Second, we need safe people with whom we can be vulnerable.

This is like coming out of hiding.

In Eden, our first parents hid from God and from one another. And when we are struggling on the inside but keeping up appearances on the outside, healing begins with honesty:

Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed. (James 5:16)

Third we need humility

We need to approach sensitive issues like this with sober, humble hearts.

As the English Reformer, John Bradford, observed criminals being led to execution, he said, “There, but for the grace of God go I.” In other words, ***that could have been me.***

A pure mind develops, not through pride, but through dependence. God’s grace is limitless and always available.

So, guard your heart—not with self-confidence, but with prayer, community, and the gentle strength of Jesus. **This is the holy habit of purity.**

Reflect & Discuss:

1. When do you feel most vulnerable when it comes to purity?
2. When temptation comes, what Scripture could you access immediately for your protection?
3. What are some of the challenges you face in your quest to find a safe person with whom you could be more honest?
4. As you reflect on Warning Light #5 and Holy Habit #5, what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? What steps will you take?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you understand temptation yet were without sin. Create in me a clean heart. Strengthen me when my thoughts drift towards impurity and lead me back to your ways.

Give me humility to confess, courage to seek help, and grace to walk in the light.

Guard my heart today and shape me to become more like You. Amen.

Dashboard Indicator #6

Are You Isolated, or Investing in Others?

WARNING LIGHT #6:

ISOLATION: Am I Drifting Away from God's Design for Interdependence?

When the heart begins carrying more than it was meant to carry alone, leadership effectiveness often narrows rather than widens. One of the earliest signs is isolation.

In leadership, isolation is rarely a deliberate choice; it is more often a drift. What begins as a well-intentioned desire to avoid burdening others—or the practical assumption that it's quicker to do things yourself—can slowly become a pattern of carrying loads God never intended you to carry alone.

Isolation is described in Ecclesiastes 4:8:

There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?"

That is a striking picture of productivity without companionship, achievement without joy. There was no one to gently challenge him, no one to slow him down.

Thankfully, Moses had a trusted companion in his father-in-law, Jethro. Exodus 18 gives us a window into their interaction at a critical juncture in Moses' leadership. As wise mentors do, Jethro first affirmed Moses by rejoicing in all that the LORD had accomplished through him.

Jethro then went on to ask two perceptive questions:

What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone as a judge, while all these people stand around you from morning to evening? (Exodus 18:14).

To his credit, Moses gave a straightforward answer: *Because the people come to me to seek God's will.* Moses' isolation was not born of laziness or pride, but of giftedness and calling. Yet as a true mentor-friend, Jethro dared to say what

Moses could not see: *What you are doing is **not good***. His words echoed God's declaration in Eden: *It is **not good** for man to be alone*.

Before my first ministry burnout, Jethro's assessment of Moses' isolated leadership style could have been written about me—*The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone* (Exodus 18:18).

Sadly, I didn't recognize it at the time. It took a car wreck to get my attention. On my way from Christchurch, New Zealand, to Queenstown, to speak at a conference, I was driving too fast. The fuel gauge was on empty when my car hit a concrete bridge and landed on a boulder in the Roaring Meg River. It was a metaphor of how I was living: running on empty and driving too fast. God graced me soon after that with a Jethro-type mentor who was able to ask questions that have formed the basis of this "7 Warning Lights" and "7 Holy Habits" series of devotionals.

Have you, like Moses, experienced God's hand of blessing on your life and ministry? Are you doing things alone? Do decisions bottleneck with you? Have you drifted—unwittingly—into an independent rather than interdependent style of leadership?

Could Jethro's courageous words—***not good***—be the Holy Spirit's whisper to you today? Before rushing to a solution, allow this still, small voice of the Spirit to register as a warning light.

Reflect & Discuss

1. Where have you noticed Isolation creeping in through busyness, pressure, or success?
2. In what ways might your strengths or gifting be contributing to isolated leadership?
3. Who currently has permission to ask you hard questions like Jethro did with Moses?
4. What kind of decision-making, approval-giving or burden-bearing depends on you alone? Why?

Prayer:

Faithful and gracious God, You never designed us to carry life or leadership alone. Forgive us for the ways we have drifted into isolation—through busyness, success, or the quiet belief that we must manage on our own.

Open our eyes to where our loads have become too heavy and our circles too small. Give us the humility to welcome trusted voices, the courage to share responsibility, and the wisdom to live interdependently as You intended.

Help us hear Your gentle warning not as condemnation, but as grace. Lead us back into life-giving community, for Your glory and our good. Amen.

HOLY HABIT #6

INTERDEPENDENCE: *Learning to Invest in Others*

Let me ask you a simple question:

Who is walking alongside you so that you can lead in a way that is healthy and sustainable? Do they know what warning signals might be flashing on your life or ministry dashboard right now? And how vulnerable have you really been with them?

The story of leadership in Scripture is not one of heroic independence.

It is the story of holy interdependence.

Ecclesiastes describes a person who is ... *all alone* ... –working hard yet isolated and joyless (Ecclesiastes 4:7-8). But then the writer turns and shows us something better: *Two are better than one* ... (Ecclesiastes 4:9) because partnership brings support, encouragement and protection. If one stumbles, the other helps them back up.

Let me repeat that question. Do you have someone partnering with you who knows your vulnerabilities and can steady you when you wobble?

We all need others.

- Moses needed Jethro to pull him back from overload (Exodus 18:13-28).
- Joshua needed Moses to give him fresh courage (Deuteronomy 34:9).
- David needed Nathan to confront him with grace (2 Samuel 12:1-7).
- Timothy needed Paul to inspire him with a bigger vision (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

Sometimes the need is mutual.

- Naomi needed Ruth's companionship, and Ruth needed Naomi's wisdom (Ruth 1:6-2:9).
- Saul needed Barnabas to speak up for him (Acts 9:26-29) and Barnabas needed Saul's expertise in Antioch (Acts 11:22-26).

This is what New Testament writers called the one-anothers:

- I encourage you; you encourage me. (Hebrews 3:13)
- I pray for you; you pray for me. (James 5:16)
- I carry your burdens; you carry mine. (Galatians 6:2)

God never intended his people, especially his leaders, to flourish in isolation.

We are members of one body: the Body of Christ. And body parts need each other. *The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'* (1 Corinthians 12:21-22).

So how do you find a trusted mentor-friend to share your life with?

Start where you always need to start. Pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Then pay attention to the people God has already placed near you. Take note of what some call a Divine “click”—a growing sense of trust and affinity. Arrange time to meet for mutual encouragement. And remember, your primary role is not to fix, but to ask questions and listen to each other.

Luke tells the story of two disciples walking the road to Emmaus. They were processing the heartbreak of Jesus' death. They were processing life, but they were still missing something.

They were walking together, but without Christ. Until Jesus came alongside them.

He walked with them. He listened. As he opened the Scriptures, their hearts burned, and as he broke bread, they realized who he was.
(Luke 24:13-35)

Interdependence overcomes isolation. But it goes to an even deeper level when we add dependence on Christ.

As I look back on 50 years of Christian leadership in various roles and ministries, it has been the mutual mentors in my life, the “Jethro’s” or “Barnabas’s” who have sustained me. They have been companions when I was alone, stabilizers when I might have tripped up, guides when I had almost lost my way, and encouragers when the wind had gone out of my sails.

And even more than that, it is the endless love and faithful companionship of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that means I will never really walk alone.

Servant leadership is daily dependence on Christ. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

And it is also the courage to walk with others.

So, take one simple step this week:

Pray.

Then reach out to someone you trust. Invite them to walk alongside you.

Healthy leadership is not independence. It is dependence—on Christ, and on the people he has graciously provided.

Reflect & Discuss

1. Who can you trust to be able to understand and support you through the real pressures and vulnerabilities of your leadership?
2. When are you most tempted to drift into isolation?
3. What would it look like to take one step toward a mentor-friend relationship this week?
4. As you reflect on Warning Light #6 and Holy Habit #6, what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? What steps will you take?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you never designed me to walk alone. Forgive me for the times I've tried to lead in independence or hiddenness.

Give me courage to be known, wisdom to seek the right people, and humility to both give and receive support.

Teach me to walk with others—and to walk closely with You. Amen.

Dashboard Indicator #7

Are You Pretending, or Leading with Integrity?

WARNING LIGHT #7:

INAUTHENTICITY: *Am I Pretending to Be What I'm Not?*

Just like isolation, inauthenticity is a drift rather than a decision. Leaders like King David were upheld as examples of integrity over long periods of their lives, then gradually and tragically slid into pretense and deception.

How could David conceal his affair with Bathsheba for months? He who spoke of his integrity (Psalms 7:8; 25:21; 41:12), and of whom it was said, *And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them* (Psalm 78:72). Integrity is not lost overnight. It is usually compromised in small, hidden ways.

What hints at David's lack of authenticity in the biblical narrative?

Was it his prideful disobedience? Although Deuteronomy 17:17 taught that the king must not have many wives lest his heart be led astray, David had eight.

Was it his prayerlessness? As David reflected on the cause of his downfall he said, *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away ...* In other words, for an extended season my prayer life withered. Instead of confessing, I remained silent (Psalm 32:3-4).

Was it his isolation? Not only was he silent in confession, but for about nine months he avoided mentor-friends like Nathan the prophet. When we hide, we invariably hide alone. When no one really knows us, it is tempting to give the impression that all is well.

Might it have been a heart issue?

James 1:5-8 goes beneath the surface and diagnoses the disease:

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive

anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

James identifies the condition as doublemindedness (literally ‘two-souled’). It is his way of describing a divided heart—a heart that teaches on holiness but fails to practice it.

Only ten percent of an iceberg is what we see. Ninety percent is below the waterline. Leaders may project an image of purity, while secretly engaging in sinful behavior patterns.

What people see is a spiritually healthy leader, not realizing that their leader may lack grace, compassion, and truth in the hidden places.

Jesus called this hypocrisy. In his Sermon on the Mount, he gave the example of Pharisees who were paragons of virtue in their day. They created the impression of being generous, but it was all an act. Speaking to his disciples he said, *Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.* They were doing godly deeds, with the secret motivation to be noticed and approved by others.

Outwardly the Pharisees would have passed the test of prayerfulness. They would drop to their knees on the street corners and pray long and eloquent prayers. Jesus called them hypocrites—actors, wearing a mask of piety. It was inauthenticity—leadership from the outside in.

How is it with you? Is there a growing gap between who you appear to be and who you really are before God? Allow the Holy Spirit to do his work of conviction and restoration. Make David’s plea be yours: *Create in me a clean heart O God ...* (Psalm 51:10).

Reflect & Discuss

1. If inauthenticity is a drift rather than a sudden failure, what small shifts or compromises do you think may often initiate that drift in leaders?
2. Where do you feel the greatest pressure to appear spiritually healthy?
3. David spoke of keeping silent and wasting away. What keeps leaders silent when confession and transparency would bring healing?
4. Using the iceberg image, what aspects of your life are most visible to others? What aspects are mostly below the surface? Whom do you allow to see below the waterline?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Bring me out of hiding. Where I have performed instead of abiding in you, gently lead me back. Free me from the need to impress, defend, or pretend.

Make me whole, truthful, and at rest in your love. Amen.

HOLY HABIT #7

INTEGRITY: *Leading From the Inside Out*

How would you describe the part of your life that no one sees but God?

Does what people see on the outside match what is true on the inside? Are you living honestly when no one is watching? Do you lead with integrity?

The reality is that many highly regarded leaders start the race strongly but don't finish well. And the problem is rarely something visible. More often it begins in the hidden places of the inner life.

On the outside, things appear to be going well. On the inside, there may be compromises, secret sins, or unresolved fractures of the soul. Integrity is not lost in a moment, but through an unexamined life.

Jesus named the problem with piercing clarity:

Now then you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. (Luke 11:39)

He compared them to a dishwasher that cleans only what can be seen, while leaving the inside still soiled. The Pharisees appeared clean, but behind closed doors their hearts were divided.

So, where do we look for an example of integrity over the long haul? No biblical character was sinlessly perfect apart from our Savior, but one other stands out to me.

Passing the "Little" Test (Daniel 1:3-21)

Daniel, the Hebrew exile in Babylon, was a beacon of integrity in a dark place. He was among the brightest and best of Hebrew youths conscripted into King Nebuchadnezzar's service.

Far from home, Daniel *purposed in his heart* not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, likely offered to the Babylonian gods. He chose vegetables and water instead. He could have reasoned, "No one back home will know." Or, "It's just a small compromise." But Daniel stayed true to God in the "little things." And in time, those small decisions revealed his integrity.

At the end of the training period, Daniel and his three companions were ten times wiser than the other trainees. They embodied Jesus' words in Luke 16:10: *Whoever is faithful in very little is faithful in much.*

An Open Window: Integrity Under Pressure (Daniel 6:1-28)

Integrity over the long haul, begins with integrity in small decisions—but it will eventually be tested.

Later in life, Daniel was promoted to become one of three commissioners over the kingdom. He was so capable that the king planned to set him over the whole realm.

With promotion came jealousy. The other officials searched for grounds to accuse him, but they could find nothing—because Daniel was trustworthy. They were so desperate that they resorted to setting a trap. Anyone who prayed to any god, would be thrown into the lion's den.

Daniel went home, opened his window and prayed three times a day, just as he'd always done.

There's a quiet strength in him. A humility. Prayerfulness. A consistency. A life that is not performative, but whole.

“Lord, make me like that.”

In the face of certain death, Daniel refused to compromise. He lived with integrity, which meant that his life was not split between sacred parts and hidden parts. His private devotion matched his public leadership.

Even then, Daniel was not perfect. I'm sure, he would echo the words of another person of integrity, the Apostle Paul:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on ...
(Philippians 3:12).

Integrity is less about never failing. It's about being honest with ourselves, trusting others, and God.

Integrity is choosing character over convenience; it's choosing wholeness, over a divided heart.

Reflect & Discuss:

1. Why might Christian leaders be tempted to live a split life—one version public, another private?
2. What are some little compromises that could slowly erode leaders' souls over time?
3. Which aspects of Daniel's life of integrity inspired you most?
4. As you reflect on Warning Light #7 and Holy Habit #7, what has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? What steps will you take?

Prayer:

Lord, you see the parts of my life no one else sees. You know where my life is whole and where it is divided. I don't want to polish the outside and ignore what is happening on the inside.

Give me Daniel's courage in my small choices and the strength to remain faithful when my integrity is tested. I long for my private life to match my public life. Give me an undivided heart.

Please make me whole.

Amen.



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