

***7 Warning Lights for Highly Vulnerable Leaders*** is a seven-day devotional, originally published on YouVersion, designed to help leaders reflect on hidden vulnerabilities that may lead to exhaustion. Each of the Warning Lights has a counterpoint in the parallel devotional—*7 Holy Habits for Highly Dependent Leaders*.

Written for leaders in the home, workplace, and ministry, **7 Warning Lights** invites both young and seasoned leaders to examine their lives prayerfully. These warning lights are not exhaustive, but signposts toward a lighter, wiser, and more joyful leadership.

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## WARNING LIGHT #1

### **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're 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

### **Scriptures for Further Meditation**

- Proverbs 11:2
- Proverbs 16:18
- Isaiah 57:15
- 1 Peter 5:5-7

## **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. Which of the three examples do you most identify with? Why?
4. What is one small shift you could make this week toward greater dependence on God in prayer?

### **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 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

### **Scriptures for Further Meditation**

- Romans 12:12
- Colossians 4:2-4
- Ephesians 6:18

## WARNING LIGHT #3

### **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. We will return to those in **7 Holy Habits #3**.

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.*

*<sup>16</sup>You 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?
4. What is one small change the Holy Spirit may be inviting you to make in response to this warning light?

## 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

## Scriptures for Further Meditation

- 1 Kings 18:45-19:9
- Isaiah 40:28-31
- Matthew 11:28-30

## WARNING LIGHT #4:

### **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. How do you understand 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.

## **Scriptures for Further Meditation:**

- Psalm 24:3-5
- Psalm 51:10
- Matthew 5:8

## WARNING LIGHT #5:

### ***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?
5. What might interdependence rather than independence look like for you in this season?

### **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.

### **Scriptures for Further Meditation:**

- Romans 12:3-8
- Galatians 6:1-2

## **WARNING LIGHT #6:**

### **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? How might that pressure tempt you to hide rather than to be honest?
3. James speaks of being “double-minded” or divided within. What might a divided heart look like in everyday leadership?
4. David spoke of keeping silent and wasting away. What keeps leaders silent when confession and transparency would bring healing?
5. 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 Christ, gently lead me back to you. Free me from the need to impress, defend, or pretend.

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

### **Scriptures for Further Meditation:**

- 2 Chronicles 16:9
- Matthew 6:1-4
- 2 Timothy 2:20-22

## **WARNING LIGHT #7:**

### ***DISTANCE: Am I Trading Performance for Intimacy with Christ?***

Distance 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. As with several of the previous warning lights, it's more often a drift—from a season of closeness to Christ, to gradually interacting with him less and 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**

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.

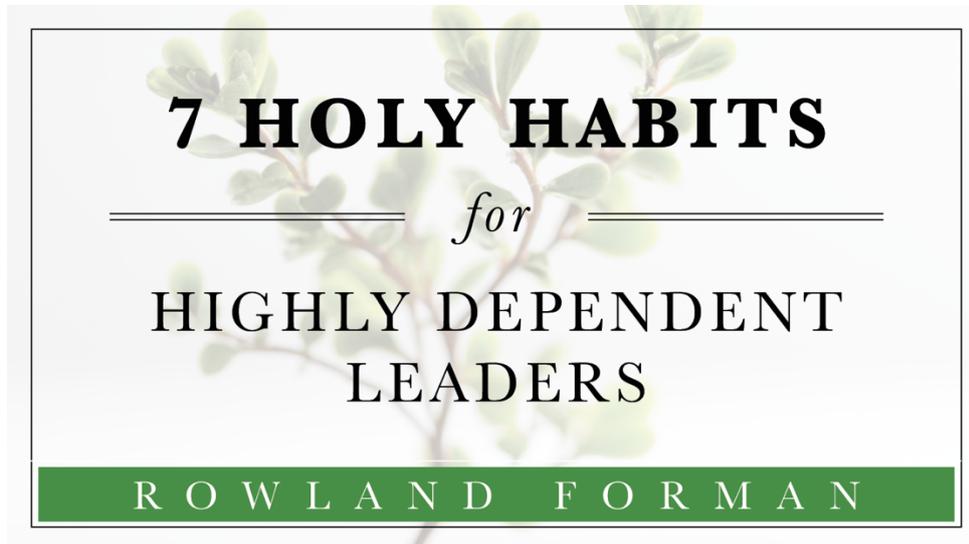
Rekindle my love for you. Restore my joy in you. And may whatever fruit comes from my life flow not from striving, but from remaining in you.

Amen.

## **Scriptures for Further Meditation**

- John 15:1-17
- John 17:3
- Philippians 3:10-11

If these warning lights have surfaced areas of vulnerability, the companion devotional: **7 Holy Habits for Highly Dependent Leaders** invites you to reflect on practices that restore and sustain.



You can find more at [rowlandforman.com](http://rowlandforman.com).

NOTES:



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