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## CHAPTER 1

# AS GO THE LEADERS, SO GOES THE CHURCH



**T**he overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader's internal life than with the leader's expertise, gifts, or experience.

It took me a long time to realize that yet another leadership seminar or more information was not the key to "successful" church leadership. In fact, my journey toward leading an emotionally and spiritually healthy church was not triggered in a seminar or book. Instead, it was brought to a head with a very painful conversation at home.

### **My Wife Couldn't Take It Anymore**

"Pete, I'm leaving the church," my wife Geri had muttered quietly. I sat still, too stunned to respond.

"I can't take any more of this stress—the constant crisis," she continued.

Geri had been more than patient. I had brought home constant pressure and tension from church, year after year. Now the woman I had promised to love just as Christ loved the church was exhausted.

We had experienced eight unrelenting years of stress.

"I'm not doing it anymore," she concluded. "This church is no longer life for me. It is death."

When a church member says, “I’m leaving the church,” most pastors don’t feel very good. But when your wife of nine years says it, your world is turned upside down.

We were in the bedroom. I remember the day well.

“Pete, I love you, but I’m leaving the church,” she summarized very calmly. “I no longer respect your leadership.”

I was visibly shaken and didn’t know what to say or do. I felt shamed, alone, and angry.

I tried raising my voice to intimidate her: “That is out of the question,” I bellowed. “All right, so I’ve made a few mistakes.”

But she calmly continued, “It’s not that simple. You don’t have the guts to lead—to confront the people who need to be confronted. You don’t lead. You’re too afraid that people will leave the church. You’re too afraid of what they’ll think about you.”

I was outraged.

“I’m getting to it!” I yelled defensively. “I’m working on it.” (For the last two years, I really had been trying, but somehow still wasn’t up to it.)

“Good for you, but I can’t wait any more,” she replied.

There was a long pause of silence. Then she uttered the words that changed the power balance in our marriage permanently: “Pete, I quit.”

It is said that the most powerful person in the world is one who has nothing to lose. Geri no longer had anything to lose. She was dying on the inside, and I hadn’t listened to or responded to her calls for help.

She softly continued, “I love you, Pete. But the truth is, I would be happier separated than married. At least then you would have to take the kids on weekends. Then maybe you’d even listen!”

“How could you say such a thing?” I complained. “Don’t even think about it.”

She was calm and resolute in her decision. I was enraged. A good Christian wife, married to a Christian (and a pastor I may add), does not do this. I understood at that moment why a husband could fly into a rage and kill the wife he loves.

She had asserted herself. She was forcing me to listen.

I wanted to die. This was going to require me to change!

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## The Beginnings of This Mess

How did we get to this point?

Eight years previously, my wife and I had begun a church with the vision to plant a church among the working classes in Queens, New York City, that would develop leaders to plant other churches both in New York City and around the world.

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that I had a vision and Geri followed. Wasn't that the biblical way large decisions were supposed to be made in a marriage?

Now, four children later, she was battle weary and wanted a life and a marriage. By this time I agreed. The problem was my sense of responsibility to build the church, and to do so for other people. I had little energy left over to parent our children or to enjoy Geri. I had even less energy to enjoy a "life," whatever that was! Even when I was physically present, such as at a soccer game for one of our daughters, my mind was usually focused on something related to the church.

I remember wondering, *Am I supposed to be living so miserably and so pressured in order that other people can experience joy in God?* It sure felt that way.

Weeks had turned into months. Months into years. The years had become almost a decade, and the crisis was now in full bloom. The sober reality was that I had made little time during those nine years for the joys of parenting and marriage. I was too preoccupied with the incessant demands of pastoring a church. (How well I now know that I will never get those years back.)

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Jesus does call us to die to ourselves. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The problem was that we had died to the wrong things. We mistakenly thought that

dying to ourselves for the sake of the Gospel meant dying to self-care, to feelings of sadness, to anger, to grief, to doubt, to struggles, to our healthy dreams and desires, and to passions we had enjoyed before our marriage.

Geri has always loved the outdoors and nature. She values her large, extended family. She loves the field of recreation, creating opportunities for people to have fun. There was rarely time for those pleasures.

## Workaholics for God

We were very busy for God. Our lives were filled with serving, doing, and trying to love other people. It felt at times that we weren't supposed to do some of the things that would give me energy and joy, so that others could. In actuality, we had died to something God never intended to be killed (as I will explain later).

I remember sitting at the dinner table with my brother-in-law as he talked about his joy in being a referee and coach for girls' basketball teams.

"Must be nice," I mumbled to myself. "Too bad I can't have that kind of freedom."

I had a profound experience of God's grace in Jesus Christ when I became a Christian at age nineteen. His love filled me with passion to serve him. Over time, however, this passion became a burden.

The incessant demands of the church planting in New York City, in addition to my neglect of the emotional dimensions of spirituality, slowly turned my joy into "duty." My life became out of balance, and I slowly bought into the lie that the more I suffered for Christ, the more he would love me. I began to feel guilty about taking too much time off and enjoying places like the beach.

My spiritual foundation was finally being revealed for what it was: wood, hay, and stubble (1 Cor. 3:10–15). I had limped along for so many years that the limp now seemed normal.

Geri's courageous step on that cold January evening saved me. God intervened dramatically through Geri's words, "I quit."

It was probably the most loving, courageous act of service she has ever done for me. It forced me to seek professional help to resolve my "vocational" crisis. Unconsciously, I hoped the counselor would straighten *Geri* out so I could get on with my life and the church.

Little did I know what was ahead!

God forced me to take a long, painful look at the truth—the truth about myself, our marriage, our lives, the church. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). It was demoralizing to admit, finally, that the intensity of my engagement in spiritual disciplines had not worked spiritual maturity into my life.

Why? I ignored the emotional components of discipleship in my life.

I had limped along for so many years that the limp now seemed normal.

## **Life before This Crisis of Intimacy**

I grew up in a New Jersey suburb, in an Italian American family, only one mile from the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

I went away to college in 1974, got involved in a Bible study on campus and became a follower of Jesus Christ during my sophomore year. That experience launched me into a spiritual journey that would include, over the next six years, the Catholic charismatic movement; a bilingual Spanish-English, an inner-city, mainline Protestant church; an African American church; Pentecostalism; and evangelicalism.

After teaching high-school English for one year, I joined the staff of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, an interdenominational ministry that facilitates Christian groups on university and college campuses. I worked for three years at Rutgers University and other New Jersey colleges. Then I went off to graduate studies at Princeton Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

During those college years I met and became good friends with the young woman who would later become my wife. In 1984 Geri and I were married, and we entered a whirlwind—not even realizing at first that the winds were anything but normal. At the five-month mark of married life, I graduated from seminary, and the next day we moved to Costa Rica. For one year we studied Spanish in preparation to return to New York City. Geri returned to her parents eight months pregnant. I returned from Costa Rica two nights before our first baby was born.

One month later the three of us moved to Queens, New York City. I spent a year serving as an assistant pastor in an all-Spanish immigrant church and teaching in a Spanish seminary. The experiences gave us opportunities to perfect our Spanish and discern God's will for our future. That year also initiated us into the world of two million illegal immigrants from around the globe, who fill large cities like New York. We became friends with people who had fled death squads in El Salvador, drug cartels in Columbia, civil war in Nicaragua, and implacable poverty in Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

In April 1987, we made an ill-fated effort to launch a new English-speaking church among second-generation Hispanics. Undaunted, we looked for other ways to follow God's dream for us.

## **The Start of the Dream?**

Finally, in September 1987, we started New Life Fellowship, a contemporary church in a working-class, multiethnic, primarily immi-

grant section of Queens. (Of the two and a half million residents of Queens, more than half are foreign-born. The immediate Corona-Elmhurst neighborhood of our current church meeting site includes people from 123 nations. *National Geographic* calls “Elmhurst 11373 the most ethnically diverse zip code in the United States.”<sup>1</sup> Roger Sanjek picked the Corona-Elmhurst section of Queens, New York, for his study called *The Future of Us All*, calling it “perhaps the most ethnically mixed community in the world”<sup>2</sup> and noting its rapid change from 1960 at 98 percent white, 1970 at 67 percent, 1980 at 34 percent, and 1990 to 18 percent white.<sup>3</sup>

Our first worship service began with 45 people. God moved powerfully in those early years. After little more than a year we had grown to 160 people. By the end of the third year, I began a Spanish congregation. By the end of the sixth year, there were 400 in the English congregation plus another 250 in our first Spanish congregation. Large numbers of these people had become Christians through New Life.

My parachurch days with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship taught me practical ministry skills, such as how to lead a Bible study, how to share the Gospel, and how to answer questions non-Christians commonly ask. My seminary education gave me the intellectual tools I needed—Greek, Hebrew, church history, systematic theology, hermeneutics, and more.

Unfortunately, neither background prepared me for planting a church in Queens. I was immediately thrust into a crash course to understand what Paul meant when he said that the Gospel comes “not with wise and persuasive words” but with “a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (1 Cor. 2:4).

During those early years of New Life, God taught us a great deal about prayer and fasting, healing the sick, the reality of demons, spiritual warfare, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and hearing God’s voice. Whatever I learned, I taught the congregation.

People were becoming Christians, with literally hundreds beginning a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The poor were being served in new, creative ways. We were developing leaders, multiplying small groups, feeding the homeless, and planting new churches. But all was not well beneath the surface, especially on a leadership level.

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We always seemed to have too much to do in too little time. While the church was an exciting place to be, it was not a joy to be in leadership—especially for my wife, Geri, and me. There was a high turnover of staff and leaders, all of which we ultimately attributed to spiritual warfare in the intensity of New York City. Perhaps this was the natural growing pains and fallout of any large corporation or business? But we weren't a business. We were a church family.

However, Geri and I did know that something was missing. Our hearts were shrinking. Church leadership felt like a heavy burden. We were gaining the whole world by doing a great work for God while at the same time losing our souls (cf. Mark 8:35).

Something was deeply wrong. I secretly dreamed of retirement, and I was only in my mid-thirties. Despite ongoing spiritual checkups—no immorality, no unforgiveness, no coveting, and so on—I could not pinpoint the source of my lack of joy. The foundation of my own personal character and development could not sustain the church we were building. It was a shaky foundation, waiting to collapse.

## **A Crawl Toward a Crisis**

During this time, Geri felt like a single parent with all the responsibilities she carried alone for our four small children. She was tired of high-pressure urban living. She was weary of the stress that I seemed to bring home weekly from church.

She wanted more of a marriage. She wanted more of a family. She wanted a life.

The bottom began to fall out when, in 1993–94, our Spanish congregation experienced a split, and relationships disintegrated that I had thought were rock solid. God was beginning to get my attention and seemed to be pushing me deeper and deeper into a pit at each turn. I approached the bottom of the pit, kicking and screaming,

I thought I was tasting hell. It turned out I was.

Little did I know the bottom was still two years away.

The event God used to get me into the pit initially was in the form of a betrayal by one of the assistant pastors of the Spanish-language congregation. For months I had heard rumors that he was dissatisfied and wanted to leave New Life Fellowship to start a new church, taking most of the people with him.

“That’s impossible,” I’d say to myself. “He is like a brother to me.” After all, we had known each other for ten years.

When I asked him about the rumors, he would categorically deny them: “*Pedro, nunca*” (“Never, Pete”).

I will never forget my shock the day I went to the afternoon Spanish service and two hundred people were missing. Only fifty people were there. Everyone else had gone with him to start another congregation.

Over the next several weeks, what seemed like a tidal wave swept over the remaining members of that congregation. Phone calls exhorted them to leave the house of Saul (me) and go over to the house of David (the new thing God was doing). People I had led to Christ, disciplined, and pastored for years were gone. I would never see many of them again.

When we talked in private over two years later, this assistant pastor said, “You made promises to disciple me, but your words meant nothing. You did not deserve to lead these people.”

When the split occurred, I did not defend myself. I tried to follow Jesus’ model and be like a lamb going to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7). “Just take it, Pete; Jesus would,” I repeatedly said to myself.

In reality, I felt as if I had let myself be raped.

I accepted all blame for the destruction. While I felt deeply betrayed, much of the failure was mine. This associate pastor had a legitimate gripe: I was overextended. I was pastoring two growing churches, one in English and one in Spanish, and I was too busy getting the “job” done and putting out fires. I lacked the flexibility and hours to fulfill my promise to give him time, friendship, or training.

Even so, I had a love for him like a brother. With the psalmist, I experienced the reality of someone “with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship” (Ps. 55:14), only later to discover that “my companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant” (Ps. 55:20). I did not believe such a betrayal was possible in the church.

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Perhaps, more importantly, I was mesmerized by his gifts and abilities. The Spanish congregation admired his dynamic leadership qualities. Did it really matter that he was not broken and contrite of heart (Ps. 51:16–17)? Did it really matter whether his character was lacking in some areas?

Yes.

The main problem was that I lacked both the courage and maturity to confront him.

The sad truth is that my “godly, lamblike response” had little to do with imitating Jesus and much more to do with unresolved issues and emotional baggage I was carrying from my past.

My taste of hell went deeper than the congregational split. Suddenly, I found myself living a double life. The outward Pete sought to encourage the discouraged people who remained at New Life. “Isn’t it amazing how God uses our sins to expand his kingdom? Now we have two churches instead of one,” I proclaimed. “Now more people can come into a personal relationship with Jesus. If any of you want to go over to that new church, may God’s blessings be upon you.”

I lied.

I was going to be like Jesus (at least the image of Jesus I imagined him to be), even if it killed me. It did—in my inward self.

My hell was that inside I was deeply wounded and angry. These feelings gave way to hate. My heart did not hold any forgiveness. I was full of rage, and I couldn’t get rid of it.

When I was alone in my car, just the thought of what had happened would trigger a burst of anger, a knot in my stomach. Within seconds, curse words would follow, flying almost involuntarily from my mouth: “You are a @#&%” and “You are full of \$\*#%.”

## **My First Call for Help**

I finally acknowledged my desperation both at church and at home. “Becoming a pastor was the worst decision I’ve ever made,” I told God in prayer.

I desperately searched for help. At last, a good pastor friend referred me to a Christian counselor. Geri and I went. It was March 1994.

I felt totally humiliated. Everything in me wanted to run. I felt like a child walking into the principal’s office. “Counseling is for messed-up

people,” I complained to God (stating something I no longer agree with). “Not me. I’m not screwed up!”

After our initial two-day meeting, the counselor made three observations: (1) I was consumed with the church; (2) Geri was depressed and lonely; and (3) our marriage lacked intimacy.

We weren’t sure what marital intimacy was, so I bought Geri a book on marriage. She could figure it out. I returned to work at the church.

Pausing and reflecting on the state of my soul were both frightening and liberating. At the time I thought all my problems stemmed from the stress and complexity of New York City. I blamed Queens, my profession, our four small children, Geri, spiritual warfare, other leaders, a lack of prayer covering, even our car (it had been broken into seven times in three months). Each time I was certain I had identified the root issue.

I hadn’t.

The root issues were inside me. But I couldn’t—or wouldn’t—admit that yet.

The next two years were marked by a slow descent into an abyss. It felt like an infinite black hole was threatening to swallow me. I cried out to God for help, to change me. It seemed as if God closed heaven to my cry rather than answered it.

Things went from bad to worse.

I continued preaching weekly and serving as the senior pastor. But my confidence to lead effectively had been thoroughly shaken by the split in the Spanish congregation. I hired additional staff and asked them to lead, which they did. Hadn’t I failed miserably? Feeling they surely could do better, I let them begin rebuilding the church.

Soon the church no longer felt like the church with the original vision we had when we planted it. Meanwhile, I struggled to be honest with how I presented the situation to others. I had a terrible habit of embellishing or editing the truth lest people get upset. (God calls that lying; I renamed it good vision-casting.) I struggled to be honest with myself about my feelings, listening especially to the feelings that did not fit into my Christian grid, such as anger, bitterness, and sadness.

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I also struggled to be honest with other people. Progress was slow and hard.

I wrestled with whether I was departing from the faith. The questions I was raising and the feelings I was experiencing were considered off-limits in most of the Christian circles in which I had lived the previous twenty years.

Wasn't I supposed to be more than a conqueror in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:37)? Why does there seem to be so much pathology covered over by a veneer of spirituality? How is it that so many people who have been Christians a long time are so judgmental and critical?

I was absolutely sure God was leading me on a new path. But where was everyone else? I struggled back and forth.

"How is it going, Pete?" a good friend would ask.

"Oh, everything is going just great. I sense God is breaking up the hard ground and planting new seeds for the future," I would reply optimistically.

The only problem: Those words were only a very small portion of the truth.

The thought of people angry at me caused me to shrink back to wait for another day. I feared that if I told different leaders in the church how I honestly perceived them—as proud, unteachable, and at times untruthful—they would leave. After the Spanish division more than a year and a half earlier, that thought was too painful to bear. I preferred to be quiet and hope the church problems would disappear all by themselves.

They did not.

I attended leadership conferences to learn about spiritual warfare and how to reach an entire city for God. I attended "refreshing meetings" at other churches. If there was a way to soak in more of God, I wanted to find it. I attended an out-of-state prophetic conference, where I received a number of encouraging personal prophecies. I intensified early-morning prayer meetings at New Life. I rebuked demons that were out to destroy my life. I studied the history of revivals. I sought counsel from numerous, nationally known church leaders.

One of my journal entries during this time sums up where I was:

Lord, I can see the Promised Land on the other side of the Red Sea—wholeness, a joyful marriage and family, joy in serving you, walking in the role you have for me in leadership—but I have no idea how to open the Red Sea to get there. *Do you, God?* If you do, could you please open it?

## **Geri Quits the Church**

I felt I was making progress personally. Perhaps it wasn't visible externally yet, but something was happening. At least I thought so. For Geri, however, things were as they had been throughout our marriage—miserable.

In the second week of January 1996, Geri told me she was quitting the church.

I finally hit rock bottom. I notified our elders of my dilemma. They agreed to a one-week intensive retreat with some professional help to see if Geri and I could sort this out.

On February 13, 1996, we went away to a Christian counseling center. Our hope was to step out of our crisis and get some objectivity about the church. I hoped for a quick end to our pain.

We spent the next five full days with two counselors. This little, short-term “Christian community” was safe enough for us to give ourselves permission to speak our hidden feelings to one another.

What we did not anticipate was an authentic spiritual experience with God. For me, it began in the strangest way. Geri and I had talked late into the night. At about 2:00 A.M., she woke me, stood up on the bed and, with a few choice words, let me have it. For the first time she told the brutal truth about how she felt about me, our marriage, and the church.

## **We Discover a Missing Bridge**

Somehow Geri's explosion, while very painful, was a liberating experience for both of us. Why? She had stripped off the heavy spiritual veneer of “being good” that kept her from looking directly at the truth about our marriage and lives.

I listened. She listened.

We looked at our parents' lives and marriages. I looked at New Life Fellowship honestly. The church clearly reflected my family of origin in significant ways.

Neither of us had ever sensed a “permission to feel” like this before.

The sad reality we discovered was that Jesus had penetrated only superficially into the depth of our persons—even though we had been Christians for almost twenty years.

Our experience that initially felt like death proved to be the beginning of a journey and the discovery of a relationship that would change my life, my marriage, my family, and ultimately the church. For the first time, I discovered the lingering power of the families we were born into. We left them when we got married, but somehow they were still shaping our lives.

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Paul teaches that once a person comes to faith in Christ, “the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17 NASB). I never imagined that influential sin patterns, passed on from generation

to generation in my family, were still operative. Since I believed the power of Christ could break any curse, I glossed over the idea that I was still being shaped by a home I had left long ago.

Examining my heart revealed a mixed set of drives. Part of my passion was for God’s glory. Other parts were driven by a complex set of motives that I did not have the tools or the time to sort out. We began to look beneath the surface of our lives into entirely new arenas.

In my prayers, I told God that I was sorry. I had been sincere about giving my all to serve God and his kingdom. Who would have ever dreamed that my commitments would result in such disappointments? With all my background in prayer and the Bible, it was quite a shock to realize that whole emotional layers of my life existed that God had not yet touched. These became the seeds of the six principles of emotionally healthy churches found in chapters 5 through 10.

**A New Set of Eyes?**

### A New Set of Eyes?

After this breakthrough, it seemed as if God had given me a new set of eyes to read Scripture. Truths that I only understood intellectually soon became part of my experience with God.

I saw Jesus able to express his emotion with unashamed, unembarrassed freedom:

- He shed tears (Luke 19:41).
- He was filled with joy (Luke 10:21).

- He grieved (14:34).
- He was angry (Mark 3:5).
- Sadness came over him (Matt. 26:37).
- He felt sorrow (Luke 7:13).
- He showed astonishment and wonder (Mark 6:6; Luke 7:9).
- He felt distress (Mark 3:5; Luke 12:50).

Jesus was anything but an emotionally frozen Messiah.

At the same time, I observed how Jesus was able to separate himself from the expectations of the crowds, his family, and his disciples. His relationship with his Father freed him from the pressures of those around him. He was not afraid to live out his own unique life and mission, regardless of other people's agenda for his life.

Along with my life partner, Geri, I sensed we had a long road ahead, both as two separate individuals and as a married couple. The goal was not to change the church but to change us—or rather, to allow God to change us. Yet we immediately realized we were in unexplored territory, on a journey that was taking us beyond the Christian training we had received during the previous twenty years. We were taking a ride that only God could control. We were being led far from our safe shore of understanding God and relating to others. The rigid, tight box into which we had unwittingly placed God had been split open.

A part of us couldn't wait to see what God would do next. But another part of us was frightened. God clearly wanted us to open up to his Spirit the depths of our interior that we were only now discovering. This looked as if it was going to be very bloody—like a death.

Our understanding of the inseparability of emotional health and spiritual maturity would be a process, much like our daily relationship with God. Indi-

viduals may have a critical moment of receiving Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, but there is, for almost everyone, a period or many months or many years beforehand in which God is working in them.

In the same way, it took repeated encounters over two years for God to claw away my limited view of him and the Christian life.

For example, God was clearly speaking to me through the gift of depression, an unhappy spouse, and a life that would periodically spin out

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of control. My only response to these painful realities was: “God, please remove them as quickly as possible so I can go on with your work!”

The only problem was I was not open to God speaking or moving in my life in those ways. My paradigm included God speaking through Scripture, prayer (an inner voice), sermons, a prophetic word, and sometimes, circumstances—but surely not this!

## The Unexpected Beneficiary—New Life Fellowship

What God did in our lives spilled out into the church immediately, beginning with our staff team, then our elder board, and eventually the rest of our leadership. For the first

For the first time, I understood what it meant to minister out of who you are, not what you do.

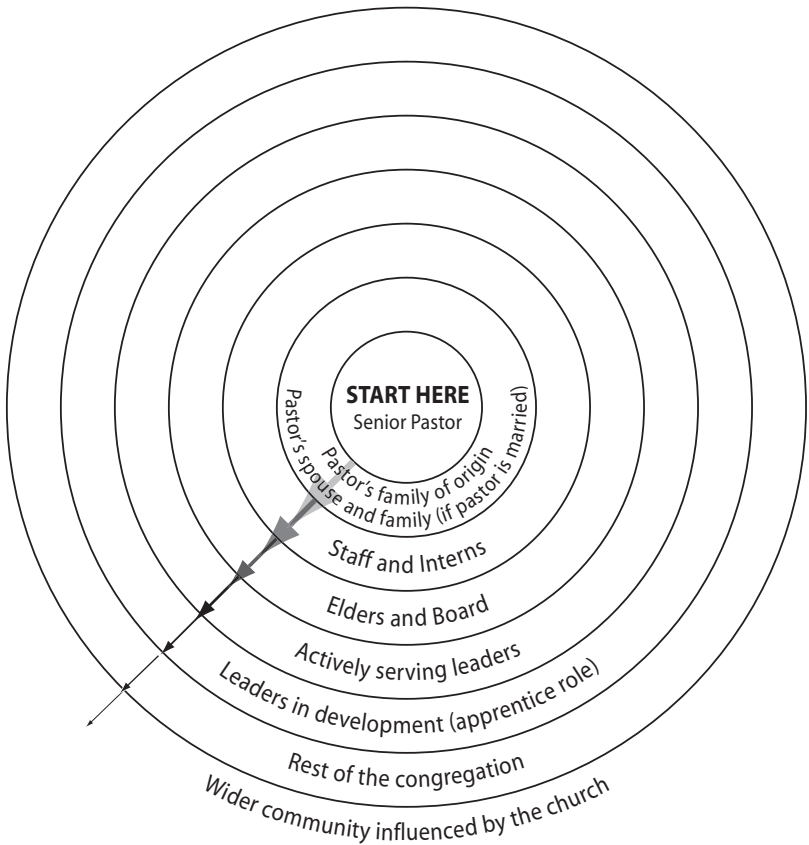
time, I understood what it meant to minister out of who you are, not what you do. My discovery was contagious. We went from being “human doings” to “human beings.” The result has been a rippling effect, very slowly, through the entire church. Beginning with the staff and elders, interns, ministry and small-group leaders, the congregation at large—directly and indirectly—we have intentionally integrated the principles outlined in this book throughout the church.<sup>4</sup> (See chart on next page.)

## Juan and Marta

The day before I started a three-month sabbatical away from the church, Geri and I sat down at our kitchen table to meet with Juan and Marta, who had come to Christ under our ministry. They were at the time pastoring one of the Spanish-language congregations at New Life.

In their early years of leadership, Juan and Marta were vivacious, excited Christians. Juan had become a Christian at New Life. Now, seven years later, they were exhausted and feeling guilty about neglecting their two children. They were overwhelmed with all that was in front of them—problems, crises, demands, and the enormous needs from a large congregation of immigrants.

After listening to them for three hours, I felt ashamed. Juan and Marta were the products of our ministry. And they were just like their teachers!



**Concentric Circles of Applying Emotional Health**

Would this legacy of frantic, joyless, imbalanced leadership forever be the kind of fruit Christian ministry produces? I admitted later to Geri that a part of me was sad to have led them to Christ and to being pastors. What a hard life of mostly needless suffering they now endured.

Geri and I asked their forgiveness.

**Paul**

Paul fasted and prayed regularly. Working as a computer technician in Manhattan, he used his vacations to attend conferences on prayer and prophetic ministry around the country. Soon he began fasting and



praying with increasing regularity. During small group meetings, he could be found reading his Bible to receive personal words from God for the group. He frequently gave personal words of prophecy anywhere and to anyone—whether they wanted them or not.

Somebody needed to say something to him. But surely not me! What could I do? I struggled to fast through a meal, let alone for lengthy periods!

The truth, however, was that Paul was unteachable and condescending to the rest of us who were not as “spiritual” as he was. Part of becoming emotionally mature for me was to model loving confrontation, telling him what it was like to be with him and give him honest feedback as his pastor. I lovingly told him the truth about his critical spirit and pride that flowed out of his “surpassing revelations.” At least I tried.

He soon felt God move him to another church.

### **As Go the Leaders...**

According to some scholars, the four presidents prior to Abraham Lincoln were “compromise leaders,” unwilling to confront the difficult issue of slavery between the North and the South. Then a mature leader with a solid sense of who he was, what he believed and valued—regardless of the consequences—took the White House. The strength and maturity of his character and convictions in many ways forced the nation to confront the reality of the abomination of slavery. The Civil War followed.

The starting point for change in any nation, church, or ministry has always been the leader: As go the leaders, so goes the church.

But it is not enough for the leader to change.

God wants to set others free as well—whether this is their first year as a Christian or their fiftieth, whether they are single or married, and whatever their church role may be (new member, leader, or pastor). When you do the hard work of becoming an emotionally and spiritually mature disciple of Jesus Christ, the impact will be felt all around you.

The next chapters lay out a fresh paradigm for what it means to be a follower of Jesus in ways that your story becomes more of Jesus’ plan for your life.