

A person is rappelling down a dark rock face on the right side of the image. The person is silhouetted against a sky filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of blue, orange, and pink, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The person is wearing a blue shirt, shorts, and a climbing harness. A rope is attached to their harness and extends down the left side of the frame. The overall mood is one of adventure and challenge.

*Leadership*

*Courage*

Book Two

**An e-Book by:**

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## Introduction

My name is Kirk Kirlin. I'm a leadership coach for pastors and executive leaders. My passion is to champion Christian influencers to live their lives **all-in**. The thing is, most of us don't. Mark Twain once said: "*Most men die at 27... we just bury them at 72.*"

Many of you sprinted into your 20's with great aspirations, brimming with confidence, and filled with hope to change the world. Yet, somewhere between then and now, most of us have pulled back. Back from our hopes, our dreams, our noble ideals, our best intentions. If our society is to be rescued from its own self-consumption, the Church in the US will have to be vastly different—from the inside out. This can only happen when she is guided by clergy who lead courageously.

We're examining *Leadership Courage* from a series of articles that were originally posted as blog entries. Several more eBooks follow, which I hope you'll also benefit from. More than that, I hope that what you think about *as you read and reflect* will fundamentally change you.

In Book One, I made the case that the Church in North America is in a classic state of *chronic anxiety*. This not only invites us to succumb to "imaginative gridlock", as Edwin Friedman punctuates so well in his wonderful book *A Failure of Nerve*, it also attacks and tears at the kinds of courageous, godly leadership that God most desires for the Church in this hour.

Now, in e-Book Two we'll address the specific kinds of leadership that is necessary in this context. Since leadership, above all else, is a matter of the heart, *the condition of your heart* and *the quality of your love* is essential. To lead courageously in a culture that is infused with emotional juvenility, and in which many in "positions of leadership" neither lead nor want to, is a dangerous proposition. Most who hold the keys to power in our churches are insisting that the Church fail at everything *God* has called it to be and do—just to minimize the discomfort associated with change. They would rather shut the church down than be so radically transformed as to be used by God to engage the mission of Christ in American society today.

Here, in Book Two, five leadership distinctions will be offered, examined, and exemplified through the life of Jesus. Familiarize yourself with them, because, **if the Church in North America is to survive, her leaders will -- ultimately -- lead this way.** If they don't, our society will follow that of Western Europe into an amoral morass, bullied by radical Islam.

The quality and character of Christian leadership in this hour ***is just that important.***

Please feel free to share this e-Book with others, especially your pastor and anyone in Christian leadership. As always, I invite your feedback. Please visit my website [www.kirlincoaching.com](http://www.kirlincoaching.com) to contact me and to subscribe to my free email newsletter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part one)

**How is a pastor, denominational executive, lay leader, elder, or board member to lead when the culture of your organization is shot through with cowardice?**

What are the implications for George Barna's "Revolutionaries" who've been so sickened by the self-soothing silliness in churches that, while ministering passionately and creatively for Christ, they've cut themselves off from the local church? And, what of the thousands upon thousands of Christians who, frustrated by the infantile institutionalism and the soft-headed social activism of the mainline denominations, have washed their hands of the whole religious mess?

Picture yourself with the New Testament in one hand and Edwin Friedman's *A Failure of Nerve* in the other. What if Jesus, our exemplar, understood Friedman better than Friedman understood himself? Read on, and at the end, tell us what you think.

**One: Courageous leadership is not about skill, technique, or knowledge. It is, most of all, about the *presence* of the leader as he or she moves through life.**

In *Generation to Generation*, Friedman gives this definition of a leader: "**A self-defined person with a non-anxious presence**".

This chapter is the tenth in the *Leadership Courage Series*. We will examine one attribute of courageous leadership: **decisive self-definition**.

By "self-defined", I mean a person who has a clear sense of her unique calling from God and is living in alignment with that calling. **It's not enough to intellectually know who you are called to be and the unique difference you've been prepared to make [Eph 2:10] and then to live as if you were someone else. Someone with a puny, self-consuming purpose. A purpose like to feel loved, to be happy, or to feel good about myself.**



Please!

Consider Jesus' example. Notice the clarity he embodies as he moves through his relationships, through his world. At age twelve, he's in the temple, discussing the Law with the priests. Once his parents find him, his mother demands an explanation for his behavior. Jesus' replies with a question: "*Didn't you know that I must be about my father's business?*" [Lk 2:49]

Later, his brothers press him to go to the Feast, reasoning that a public figure cannot rally a following

without showing up in a big way at these big cultural gatherings. Jesus' response was interesting. He didn't say: "Wow, you're right! How am I going to establish a movement if I don't show the world who I am and what I have to say?" Nor did he say: "Quit giving me your stupid advice! For the last time, I'm not interested in becoming a political leader. Sheesh, you idiots just don't get it!"

As a self-defined person, he says: *"The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come."* [Jn 7:2-8]

My CRM teammates prefer this small modification to Friedman's definition: "a God-defined person with a non-anxious presence".



They've developed the Awaken Workshop designed to help Christians study and pray over their own lives, relationships, experiences, heart-passions, and values for one purpose: **to extract from the remarkable investment of God in each life the unique calling God intends for that person.** Awaken is nine vigorous, intentional hours dedicated to uncover the clues to who you are and why you're here.

How much concentrated time have you devoted to discovering the special impact God intends you to make with your life? [Eph 2:10] Is it any wonder you're fuzzy about what God's calling to you might be?

Armed with clarity about her calling, a mature, self-defined leader has little difficulty saying "no". In fact, **the clearer she becomes, the more she says "no" to the many good, honorable, helpful things that would take her away from living her central calling from God.** She is not upset or threatened when people don't see things the way she does. She does not need the agreement of others to bolster her confidence.

NO

She is clear. Decisive. She understands her calling. She is proactive about setting her life up to live that calling from God. Unapologetically.

**Like Jesus did.**

When his buddies encouraged Jesus to take a break, have a good meal, relax a bit, after his encounter with the Samaritan at the well, he said: *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."* [Jn 4:34] Clear. Focused. Unfazed.

Self-defined does not mean workaholic. **The mature leader takes full responsibility for his well being and destiny.** Like Jesus, he trusts the Father's goodness, love, and sovereign plan. *He does not look to other people or for his circumstances to define him.* Responsible for his own being and destiny, he lives responsibly—even amid a culture that promotes irresponsibility.

**Consider Jesus' practice of withdrawing from the press of people and ministry to commune with the Father, get perspective, and to sleep.**

Responsible for his own being and destiny, Jesus chose to get away from the people *who needed him*: those he could've healed, delivered, taught, and built a bigger, stronger, more powerful ministry around.

Why?

Maybe Jesus understood that more than skill, technique, or knowledge, **courageous leadership is, most of all, about the presence of the leader as he moves through life.** To presence himself well with people, Jesus recognized that a vital relationship with the Father, clarity, perspective, and attending to his very appropriate, very human need for rest and refreshing were necessary. Self-definition, like Jesus modeled for us, was the result of his commitment to maturity.

How's yours?



## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part two)

After illuminating characteristics of **a Culture of Cowardice** and making sobering observations about how appropriately it applies to the Church in North America today, we've turned our attention to the kind of leadership that can serve to restore the Church to a place of redemptive influence in society. Edwin Friedman, in *Generation to Generation* defines a leader as **a self-defined person with a non-anxious presence**. Last chapter, we unpacked some of what it means to be self-defined, or as my CRM teammates prefer: "God-defined".

Now, **a non-anxious presence**.



A non-anxious presence does not mean carefree, laid-back, detached, disengaged. **It means an absence of anxiety.**

As a powerful squall threatens to swamp their boat, the disciples are a mess.

Anxious.

Fearful.

Panicked.

And, Jesus ... is ... asleep. [Mk 4:38]

Non-anxious.

After benefiting from the miracle of the loaves and fish the crowd wants Jesus to seize political control, overthrow the Romans, declare himself King. His response was simply to withdraw to a solitary place, alone.

Non-anxious.

A non-anxious presence is easy to carry off when your leadership is well received, when people are saying great things about you, when folks are happy and grateful for you. **A non-anxious presence is essential when anxiety appears omnipresent.**

Recall the phrase: "Poor planning on your part does not constitute a crisis on my part".

**The less mature are always attempting to enroll others in their disquiet, their “crisis du jour”.** A perceived catastrophe on the part of certain members of the congregation does not constitute a calamity for a well-defined leader.

**Do you think for one minute that God, up in Heaven, is wringing his hands over that leaky roof, or the lawsuit brought against the church, or the lousy turnout at the society meeting?**

I often remind my coaching clients that God is not looking down at them stunned, saying: “Oh my goodness, I didn’t see *that* coming!” And, **since God is fully aware of your predicament, what do you suppose God wants to do in you as a result?**



The self-defined leader chooses to interpret these “crises” as precious opportunities to develop mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Friedman is clear: **the leader’s capacity to contain her own reactivity to the trepidation of others, to avoid becoming polarized, and to self-regulate while staying connected to those who behave as if in distress is key to both the leader’s differentiation and to catalyzing maturity in the culture.**

Think this through, Christian leader:

- a) **How are you growing in governing your own emotional reactivity?** Ask your spouse, your kids, your staff and elders: what evidence do they see of your *growth* in controlling your reactions when those around you are out-of-control themselves?
- b) **When individuals or groups are locked in opposition, are you becoming more apt to get “altitude”, above the fray, and remain curious?** Are you getting better at *living in the tension*, without knee-jerking yourself to one side or the other, primarily to exit the tension of the issue being, as yet, unresolved?
- c) **When you react with frustration and anger to the low-tolerance frustration and anger of the immature in your ministry context, you’ve put yourself in exactly the same soup!** The key is to manage yourself when in conflict and to stay in relationship with those who prefer to attack, blame, and remain irresponsible for their own being and destiny.



It takes stamina to continually define oneself to those who lack self-regulation. Sadly, that kind of stamina is not developed within a culture of cowardice. **Nor is it promoted in an American**



**education system that presses for togetherness over against the self-differentiation that is natural when honest competition and individuation is endorsed.**

As Friedman noted some 15 years ago, *most of us are leading **chronically anxious emotional dwarfs***. In many systems, the Church has become one of the hideouts for the immature.

Sad.

We could be the most powerful, clear, selfless, and confident people on the planet.

**God-defined people with a non-anxious presence.**

## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part three)

**What does it take to be a courageous leader, particularly amidst a culture that, for decades, has been steeped in cowardice?**



Can a pastor, denominational executive, or church leader *actually* turn the tide of emotional and spiritual regression before the Church loses what's left of its traction in American society?

We're examining courageous leadership, convinced that God has

you reading this e-Book so that you might begin to practice a way of being in your life, your business, your marriage, your family, your congregation, and your community for such a time as this.

To review, **courageous leadership is not a matter of skill, technique, or knowledge. Its most distinguishing characteristic is the presence of the leader as she or he moves through life.** In the past two chapters, we've explored what it means to be a self-defined person with a non-anxious presence. Now, we'll turn to a second insight from Friedman--- another attribute that Jesus modeled for us.

**Two: Take full responsibility for *your own* emotional being and destiny.**

Most pastors struggle here: living as if they were responsible for the emotional being and destiny of dozens, hundreds, even thousands of other people --- and then participating in life as if their own well-being and destiny were dependent on others: the Bishop, their elder board, the denomination, local economic trends, or some abusive control-freak in a position of congregational leadership.

**How might pastors and congregations accelerate their progress toward maturity were pastors to make this single, profound shift.**

Let's break it down.

Step one is to disconnect from the generations-long ministerial malpractice of taking responsibility for others. You and your members can't both be responsible for their well being and destiny. If you take responsibility for them, they won't. If you don't, *and* you stand with them as if they were responsible before God for their own being and destiny then maybe – just maybe – they will.



How many parents of adult children have lamented their 20-something's dependence and irresponsibility—until the parents cut off the financial flow?

Facing, for the first time, the very real possibility of starvation and homelessness, most of those chronically-immature sons and daughters *find a way* to get out of bed, land a job, and step into responsible adult lives. **But, the over-responsible parents had to cut down the safety net first. And, to do so, they had to grow their**

**capacity to tolerate the squawks and tantrums of the overly-dependent ones.** [For more on this topic, see *The Responsibility Riddle*, in Book One of this series.]

In Mt 23:37 Jesus mourns for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Offered comfort, protection, and rescue-- they said "no".

And, Jesus is clear: their choice didn't diminish him or the value of the redemption he offered. And, he was also clear that they would get to live-out the results of their decision.

So too, pastor, with you.

You are not your church. They are not an extension of you.

You don't think of yourself as an extension of your spouse, boss, siblings, or district superintendent, do you? **So, why allow yourself to be enmeshed with your congregation as if *who you are* is determined by their choices and deportment?**

Edwin Friedman, in *A Failure of Nerve*, asserts that leaders can bypass burnout by avoiding the trap of taking responsibility for others and their problems. Imagine life without the double-bind of being burdened by a false responsibility for the choices and decisions of others.

Do yourself a favor: re-read Ephesians, I & II Timothy, and Rev 2:1-7. Then, answer this:

a) Did Paul make himself responsible for Timothy's being and destiny?



b) Was Timothy responsible for the being & destiny of the church at Ephesus?

If not, who was?

What *does* the Scripture teach?

Step two is to **take full responsibility for your own emotional being and destiny**. Notice how Jesus presences himself when instructing the disciples about his betrayal [Mk 14:18-25]. You don't see him coming apart at the seams, an emotional wreck, begging Judas to reconsider. Instead, he uses the impending calamity *to instruct them* about fidelity, sacrifice, and the cost of discipleship.

At his arrest, Jesus is fully in control of his emotions and reactions. He *does not personalize* Judas' betrayal: "Oh Judas, how could you??!"

He doesn't negotiate: "Hey fellas, what if I agree to stop teaching in the Temple—would that be OK with you??"

Nor does he play the victim: "Doggone it you guys. If you'd just stayed awake and prayed *like I asked you*, none of this would've happened!!" [Mk 14:43-50]



Brought before the Sanhedrin [Mk 14:53-64], Jesus does not tantrum, collapse in an ocean of tears, call down fire, nor even expose his accusers' hypocrisy. The only response recorded by Mark is Jesus' unmistakably clear admission that yes, he *is* the Christ, and that they will one day see him sitting at the Father's right hand.

**Jesus lived as if his being and destiny were securely and completely in his Father's hands.**

Clear about his calling to serve humankind as he fulfilled the Father's will [Mk 10:45], Jesus' being and destiny was undeterred by the autonomous choices made by the autonomous human beings all around him: Pilate, Peter, Judas, the false accusers before the Sanhedrin, and on and on.

**Engaging his life in this way, Jesus catalyzed the maturing of the followers to whom he turned over the Church after his crucifixion.**

And today, he's turned that Church over to you, and me.

## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part four)

**What does it take to be a courageous leader, particularly in a culture that has been growing more cowardly, childish, self-absorbed, and immature?** Is it possible to live and lead in our Christian context so that spiritual and emotional maturity emerges?

If it is, you, as pastor, are key.

Let's review for just a moment. We've covered two essentials to lead effectively in a culture of cowardice that I say has become characteristic of the Church in North America today (2010).

One: Courageous leadership is not about skill, technique, or knowledge. It is, most of all, about the *presence* of the leader as he or she moves through life.

Two: Take full responsibility for your own emotional being and destiny.

Now we move from you to your organization, church, system, business, or family:

**Three: Promote healthy differentiation within the church or system you lead.**

Differentiation, as has been pointed out, means to take full responsibility for your own being and destiny. So, **stand in relationship with your congregants as if they were responsible for their own well being**, which, before God, of course, they are.

Remember how Jesus responded when his disciples were giving themselves to panic? Did he make himself responsible for their emotions? Their sense of wellbeing? Their comfort or discomfort?

**Ever??**



Remember the storm at sea.

In Mt 14:25-31, the disciples are terrified both by the storm and what they thought to be a "ghost" walking on the water. Still out of the boat, Jesus says: *"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

Then, as Peter goes down into the water, Jesus grabs him and asks: *"You of little faith, why*

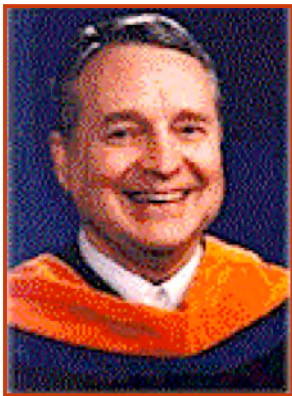
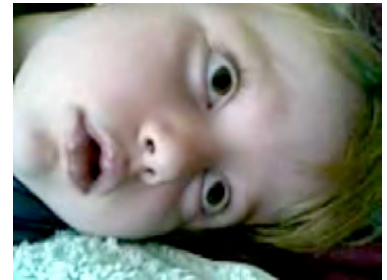
***did you doubt?"***

I imagine most pastors, instead, would exclaim something like: "Hey, great job Pete!! I am SO VERY PROUD OF YOU!! Look *how many* steps you took!! Hey fellas, let's hear it for Peter!!"

**Jesus' response indicates that he saw this incident as character-development training opportunity. As a way to prepare Peter and the others for challenges that they would eventually get to confront.** When members of your church come up against frightening challenges, what is it that you think you're doing with and for them? Comfort? Encouragement? Appeasement?

Or, are you developing them into mature, godly, followers of Christ?

When the disciples are unable to free the boy with the symptoms of epilepsy, **Jesus behaves as if they are responsible for their own preparation for ministry:** "*This kind can come out only by prayer.*" [Mk 9:29] Jesus seems to believe that regular Christians can actually free those who were suffering like this boy was.



My dear friend and mentor, Dr. J. Robert Clinton [Professor of Leadership at the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary] taught me what he calls *Goodwin's Expectation Principle*. Essentially, it is this: "**People will live up to the expectations of those whom they respect.**" Jesus seems to have understood this.

Rather than making allowances for their playing small, their love of comfort, and their penchant for control, **Jesus lived as if he expected his followers to live and minister like he did.** He expected them to trust God and step up to the challenges that life presented.

Didn't he?

**More importantly, how often and how consistently do you?**

## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part five)

If the Church in North America is to become fully alive, awake, and influential, her pastors must become what they were always intended by God to be.

### **Courageous leaders.**



What does it mean to live and lead courageously, particularly when immersed in a culture of cowardice?

So far, we've said this:

One: Courageous leadership is not about skill, technique, or knowledge. It is, most of all, about the *presence* of the leader as he or she moves through life.

Two: Take full responsibility for your own emotional being and destiny.

Three: Promote healthy differentiation within the church or system you lead.

To this we add a fourth leadership characteristic:

**Stand, as an exemplar, in the sabotage and backlash that must come.**



Edwin Friedman, in *A Failure of Nerve* does a masterful job illuminating several stunning characteristics of effective leadership. I am indebted to him for sparking the perspectives written about in this e-Book.

We've been looking at the way Jesus embodied these traits—not for intellectual edification, but to challenge you, Christian leader, to change.

As a minister of the Gospel of Christ *you are an exemplar*. Your way of life *is* a model—and it must be so. **It is ridiculous to serve in Christian ministry and to shrink from the exposure and vulnerability befitting your station.**

A leader stands.

Sometimes, that means you get to stand, alone. Always it means you are visible in ways that those who follow are not. **My invitation is to embrace the reality and necessity of standing up, of standing out, and of standing alone— or *get out of Christian ministry*.**

There is an anxiety, common to American culture, about being alone. It seems that only raving narcissists are immune from this. I disagree. **There is another kind of person who has calmed her own disquiet when coming under scrutiny – or fire.**

**It is the kind of leader we're examining in this Series.**

Consider the accounts that are chronicled in John Chapter 6: the 5,000 witness the miracle of the loaves & fish, Jesus walks on the Galilee, and a sizeable crowd follows him to the other side of the Sea. He calls them out! 'You're only here for the show; because of the miracles', is how he greets them.

Then he exposes their shallowness with his seldom-repeated "sermon in the synagogue" about eating his body and drinking his blood. [Jn 6:53f] The crowd scatters and many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him—ever.

**Does Jesus backtrack, explaining that it was just hyperbole, a figure of speech?  
Does he beg them to come back?  
Does he soften the message, lower the bar, or ease their distress?**

Read it, and see.

A few chapters later, Jesus has become *so popular* that even the Hellenized Greeks are seeking him out. [Jn 12:20-24] They ask Philip for an audience with the Master.

At this moment, they may be at the pinnacle of their popularity. Imagine Philip's enthusiasm as he tells Andrew the great news! The two go together to let Jesus know that so-and-so has requested an audience with him. Rather than seizing upon his mushrooming popularity and assigning one





of them to schedule his appointments with dignitaries, look what Jesus does. **He completely ignores the request.** Instead, he talks to the two of them about of his impending sacrificial death.

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies....

Neither the admiration nor the disdain of the crowds *and* his closest followers seems to deter Jesus from his mission. Jesus does not simply *take* a stand. **He is a stand.**

Having taken full responsibility, before God, for his being and destiny, Jesus lives as if his every movement, his attitudes, his words, and even his silence are on purpose. His Father's purpose. To establish the Kingdom of God in the lives of women and men.

This is what leaders do.

**Acclimate yourself to the rigor of taking total responsibility, before God, for your own responses to your environment and circumstances.** Friedman notes: "Leaders must not only not be afraid of that position, they must come to love it." So, you ask, where do I get that kind of courage? How could I ever come to *love* being ridiculed and adored, being evaluated and critiqued and judged all the time?

**What if you have it all, already?** What if you've been given it *in Christ*? If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation... [1 Cor 5:17]

Remember?

God's power has given us *everything we need* for life and godliness... [2 Pt 1:3]

Remember?

## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part six)

We're examining what may be a unique kind of leadership. I'm advocating that such leadership is compulsory if the Church is to provide the redemptive influence in American society that she was given, by Jesus, to bring. For fourteen segments, you've considered the regressive and infantile culture that has become normative in the Church.

For the last five, you've been invited to reinvent yourself as a distinctly *courageous* leader. In the last section, we began to consider a fourth leadership characteristic: **Stand, as an exemplar, in the sabotage and backlash that must come.** You were invited to recognize that, like Jesus, *every leader is an exemplar.*

It can be no other way.

A leader is not simply someone who gets things done or who gets other people to behave in desirable ways. A leader *is* different. She presences herself in life and relationships in a uniquely beneficial way. This uniqueness transcends behavior, skill, and knowledge. It can best be described in terms of *being*.

A courageous leader's way-of-being is distinctive. *It provokes maturity* in those she influences. The differences are palpable.

**One difference is the way a leader is in the midst of sabotage and backlash.**

Fuller Professor Dr. J. Robert Clinton has identified *Leadership Backlash* to be one of the most common methods God uses to develop leadership character. Backlash occurs when once-enthusiastic followers turn against their leader in the face of unexpected difficulties. In *A Failure of Nerve*, Edwin Friedman elaborates: **"Mutiny and sabotage came...from colleagues whose will was sapped by unexpected hardships along the way."** It is the leader's person and posture amidst this collegial sabotage that is so stunningly effective.



A courageous leader recognizes how common backlash and sabotage is, and that both are the product of evacuated courage in those disheartened by difficulty. The leader interprets backlash as an opportunity to model a way of leading that inspires confidence [from the Latin, literally "*with trust*"] toward God, and deepens the maturity and faithfulness of colleagues and followers. **Further, this kind of leader chooses to interpret the opposition as *provision from Heaven.***

Consider Jesus.

In John 6:66 we read that *many* of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer followed him. Immediately, Jesus turns to the twelve and asks: Don't you want to go away as well? He saw the departure of the many as an opportunity to test the resolve of the leaders closest to him.

Embracing the reality of God's sovereignty and apprehending the security of God's unconditional love, **she leans into the resistance with a posture of confident curiosity.** "God has this!" she might remind herself while stepping toward those who, unnerved by fear, have just betrayed her.

This may shock you: **it is the leader's humility that creates the opening to presence himself so resourcefully.**



Just a few verses later,

Jesus is teaching in the temple courts. When those who hear him begin to applaud his brilliance, he says: *"My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth..."*

## **Humility.**

The leader recognizes that he is not powerful enough to have caused the upset nor the circumstances that many say upset them. Aware that each person connected to the disappointment has a contribution, he faces small temptation to assume he's responsible for the unwelcomed turn of events. He has grounded himself in the understanding that **he is not significant enough to have produced the organization's successes or its failures.** He has a part. His colleagues have a part. The system has a part. And, factors beyond anyone's control have also contributed to the outcome.

Rather than encouraging carelessness, the leader's decision to interpret life this way empowers responsibility to one another and to the ministry's mission and goals.



**Scapegoating, so common in an anxious, immature culture** is antithetical to the stand of the leader and the developing ethos of the organization. Even when the less-mature succumb to its pull, the leader is not provoked to respond in kind.

Keeping in mind how consequential it is to shift the culture of any church, the leader has developed stamina to live into Paul's charge in 1 Cor 16:13-14: *"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong..."*

I love the ancient King James rendering: ***"Quit ye like men."***

## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part seven)

What kind of pastor will lead the Church in our day to salt and light the world?

**Pastor, what can you do to arouse your church from its slumber and stand in the storm of insolence and juvenility that such a stirring will provoke?**

We've been examining what it means to live and lead courageously amidst **a culture of cowardice** that appears to have captured the Church in North America, leaving American society rudderless in a tsunami of sensuality, secularism, and self-centeredness.

Thus far, we've suggested:

- Courageous leadership is not about skill, technique, or knowledge. It is, most of all, about the *presence* of the leader as he or she moves through life.
- Take full responsibility for your own emotional being and destiny.
- Promote healthy differentiation within the church or system you lead.
- Stand, as an exemplar, in the sabotage and backlash that must come.

I am indebted to Edwin Friedman's remarkable examination of leadership: *Failure of Nerve*, for this concept: **Don't "push on the rope": the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.**

I've done a little boating. One summer in Leland, Michigan, you might have seen me standing on a dock, tugging on a line, endeavoring to center the hull of our friends' Boston Whaler over the submerged bunks of a small boat lift. Without thinking, I "push" my hand out, as if the boat will somehow move away from me.



It's as if I've imagined that the rope has somehow stiffened so that it can propel the boat away from the dock and over the lift. Of course, it doesn't. It can't. **You cannot provoke change by pushing on a rope.**

Friedman offers this: **the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.**

Yet, weekend after weekend, well-intentioned ministers stand in pulpits all over the land, bringing scintillating insights from God's Word, hoping that *learning will motivate life change*.

Statistics, sadly, illuminate the truth of the matter. People, by and large, are *not* changed—at least, not much.

Too many of our listeners are invulnerable to insight. **Without compelling motivation, there is insufficient hunger to embrace the price and pain of change.** Even change that sounds good, that would be preferable to the status quo, or that could propel the listener toward an honorable outcome will elicit mental agreement. And, it will not ignite action.



What's the key?

Think about Jesus' parable of the farmer. [Mark 4:3-20] The key to fruitfulness was *the soil* ...not the seed. Yet, we in pastoral ministry devote hundreds of very valuable hours fussing over the seed—while ignoring the soil.

Does that make sense to you?

Look at it again: *“Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”* [Mark 4:15-20]

Jesus' directs our attention to **the condition of the soil**. “Some people are...” he begins. The unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.

So, why is it that we devote ourselves to sifting, sorting, cleaning, massaging, and polishing *the seed*? Sermon preparation in post-Enlightenment Christendom consumes *the largest portion* of an Evangelical pastor's workweek. Why does that pastor give so little attention to tilling the soil of the hearer's hearts?

**Could it be that we've forgotten what business we're in?**

Maybe we've inadvertently supplanted the make-mature-disciples-who-live-like-Jesus-business with the faithfully-proclaim-the-Word-of-God-business. We're commissioned to faithfully proclaim God's Word so *that* people around us live like Jesus.

Aren't we?

Could it be that to distill the ministry of the Gospel down to faithful proclamation without *equal regard* to the life-change taking place in those we lead is akin to straining gnats and swallowing camels? **If the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight and if the key to fruitfulness is the condition of the soil, would it be wise to get *really, really good* at soil preparation?**

Several years ago I was in Honolulu, in training with a catalytic character development ministry. I'd been "an apprentice" for what seemed like an eternity. It was late at night, and Dan, my trainer, walked with me.

I was feeling defeated... confused... perplexed. He'd given me the opportunity to facilitate a number of crucial conversations with seminar participants, and the conversations hadn't gone well. I clearly had missed it, and I didn't know why.



What Dan said to me next has changed my life.

I recount it in the hope that it will change yours as well. He said: **"Kirk, you keep handing people fish." "We are not here to give people fish. We are not here to teach people how to fish. We are here to *provoke their hunger.*"**

**When a woman is hungry enough, she will feed herself.** If fish is the way, she will



teach herself to fish, or find someone to show her how, or find a way to get fish out of the lake and onto her family's dinner table.

**In study after study conducted in Western Europe, welfare recipients did not find jobs until *after* the government's assistance ran out. Then, *almost immediately* they found work.**

Hungry enough, they were no longer unmotivated.

Motivated, they were *vulnerable* to insight.

They discovered. They learned. They changed. They took risks. They found work. And, they kept on working in the jobs they got. They fed themselves and their families. Starvation did not skyrocket. Neither, according to what I've read, did crime. The unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.

What might occur if you got really, really good at provoking your parishioners' hunger for God's Word?

**What if, this coming year, you devoted yourself to provoking their hunger for maturity?**

What if your parish became a more *uncomfortable* place to stay spiritually and emotionally immature? You might get to reinvent yourself in the process. Trusting Jesus in ways you haven't in a long time, you could trade familiar patterns and skills for fresh, provocative, people-changing ones.

Why wouldn't you?

Tick, tock...



## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part eight)

We're investigating a fifth leadership concept: **Don't "push on the rope": the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.** This perspective is of central importance to pastors who are committed to lead their congregations through change. Maybe it's because the religious culture's assumption is that the shepherd's role is to comfort and soothe the sheep, that ministers tend to give *most* of our time and attention to those *least motivated* to change. Of course, there are exceptions.

Yet, in my more than 20 years of ministry—much of it to ministers—it is **stunning how much of pastors' time, thoughts, and prayer lives are consumed with those who are least motivated to follow.**

While you are breaking yourself to provide compelling insight to inspire the unmotivated, they are breaking your will to lead. They are standing in the way of the change you believe God wants. They are preventing the advance of God's Kingdom in your city. **Once the pastor's will is broken, it's "lights out" for that church**—and for the un-churched community the congregation was assembled, by God, to influence.



Pastor, your courageous, decisive leadership is just that important. **Your will, your resolve, and your stamina in the face of opposition from people you love dearly,** is essential to the Kingdom's advance in American society.

This segment is written to help you avoid the energy-sapping, confidence-draining effect of the unmotivated on your leadership.

To lead, you can't "push on the rope".

Rather than focusing on the resistant, **give yourself to those who are most willing to go with you.** Give *them* your time, your creativity, and your energy. In any community, you'll find three kinds of people. This is *over-simplified* just a bit, so you can use and benefit from the concept.



There are some in your congregation who have trained themselves to take risks, to try new, untested possibilities, to leap into the unknown just to see *if something better* can result. **These are pioneers.** They are God's gift to you!

The majority in any established congregation, however are not pioneers.

**They are what I call "belongers".**

Belongers are willing to change when certain conditions exist. They've trained themselves to move *with* the congregation, not in front of it.



They will move when the discomfort of not moving is greater than the risks associated with the change. Put another way, *they will move when they decide it is safe to do so*—and not before. The belongers are God's gift to you!

They build community. They are stabilizers. Many of these folks are great, reliable workers in the bowels of your organization.

This leaves a third group. **The resisters.** These are people who have trained themselves to avoid the possibility of loss, and so are unlikely to implement *any* change that can be avoided or delayed.



A core motivation is to avoid being wrong. Not to fail. They too, are God's gift to you! They are steady. They are loyal. They're the ones likely to show up whenever the doors are open. Traditionalists, they engage in church life in much the same way people have for fifty years and longer. They *still* tithe.

Resisters and pioneers interpret life in mutually-exclusive ways. When a pioneer is confronted with an opportunity, as soon as she sees the *possibility* of improvement, her default is: "Why not?" The resister will intuit the possibility of failure or loss and think: "Why take an imprudent risk?" The believer will move, but only when it's "safe".

The culture that's been established in your congregation will determine how predominant each group is. Curiously, "church" is one of the few places in American society where resisters can congregate en masse. I suppose government is the other. Think bureaucrats, not politicians.

Here's the key: **Pastor, live with your pioneers!** Make sure *they* populate your appointment calendar. **Every week, insure that you spend *most* of your time with the pioneers.** In the next section, we'll clarify what to do when you're together, so the change you believe God wants, actually takes hold in the congregation.

**For now, work to clear your calendar of resisters, and to fill it with pioneers.** It may take you three months or more to wean yourself away from the passion-extinguishing complaining and tantruming of the unmotivated.

**Proactively schedule your office appointments with the folks who are most responsive to your leadership.** Invest generously in their lives. Support them as they grow in Christ. You'll enjoy it a *lot* more, and more Kingdom fruit will be borne, as well.

Nine months from now, you could be *leaping* into your workweek with a vigor, optimism, and enthusiasm that most of your folks have *never seen in you*.

## Leadership in a Culture of Cowardice (part nine)

Examining courageous leadership, a fifth principal is: **Don't "push on the rope": the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.**

Watching ministers lead for more than thirty years, it's breathtaking how diligently and fruitlessly so many labor to lead those who are *least-motivated* to follow.

No wonder the burn-out rate in the pastorate is dwarfed only by the drop-out rate.

Here's an alternative, practiced by the most effective leaders in ministry: Pastor, live with your pioneers.



**Make sure *those most ready to follow your leadership* populate your appointment calendar. Every week, spend *most of your time* with the pioneers:** those who've trained themselves to take risks, to try new possibilities, to leap into the unknown just to see *if something better* can result. Ask about their passions for the things God has laid on your heart. Listen for the overlap between your vision and theirs, your heart and theirs, your passions and theirs. ***This area of overlap is where you and they get to play!***

Pray with them. Dream with them. If your dream is to touch the un-churched, envision the kinds of impact you'd most want to have on the lives of those you'll serve.

Imagine yourselves serving authentically, regularly, generously—for their benefit.



Do some planning and strategizing...but *please* don't get a brain cramp trying to figure it all out in advance.

Planning for ministry is an almost irresistible temptation for church people. Don't waste your vigor over-planning in the comfort of your church conference room.

**Quick, before you lose your nerve, get out of the church and bless people.**

Thrust yourself into action with your pioneers. Get off the property. Meet with civic leaders. Learn where your congregation can help, where you can make a God-honoring difference, and go after it. Love people. Serve them.

**For Heaven's sake, experiment.**

Incubate.  
Pilot.  
Test.  
Adjust.  
Go-again, fearlessly and flexibly.

When what you try doesn't work—***do something else. Do anything else.***

Let these be rich times of learning and of enjoying the adventure together.

As your pioneers love and care for the un-churched *in ways that bless their lives*, those you serve will be skeptical, initially. They'll be wary that church people would serve without a hidden agenda, a "gotcha", a hook.

As you keep being with them for their benefit--and not for yours--their skepticism will be replaced with gratitude.



Communicate their appreciation broadly through the congregation.

**Raise the visibility of your pioneers; make them your “heroes”** and make a big deal of their willingness to risk, innovate, and lead in the change.

Over time, the belongers will decide it's beneficial *and safe* to join in. Have places ready for them to serve. Plan these in advance. **Eventually, more and more belongers will embrace the change, until it becomes the “new normal” for your congregation.**

All the while, another amazing transformation is taking place. As you continue serving the un-churched, from a place of humility and unconditional love, their gratitude will be accompanied by openness. *When they ask* about your relationship with God, then you answer.

***“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*** [1 Pt 3:15b]

The key, Pastor, is to give yourself to the pioneers, the risk-takers, the adventurers. Suspend your impulse to convince the resisters and to involve the belongers. They will watch—from afar—and when it seems safe to them, they will begin to play. In the meantime, **have a blast with your pioneers**. Make a difference in the lives of those you’re serving. Enjoy what God does.

Hurray!