

A silhouette of a person rappelling down a rock face against a sunset sky. The person is wearing a blue shirt and shorts, and is holding a rope. The sky is filled with colorful clouds in shades of blue, orange, and pink. The rock face is dark and textured.

Leadership

Courage

Book Three

An e-Book by:

Kirk R. Kirlin www.KirlinCoaching.com February 2012

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 2 |
| The Adventurous Life | 4 |
| Undermine the 80/20 Rule | 13 |
| The Unreasonableness of Being Reasonable | 23 |
| Go First! | 2 |

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 **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 us sprinted into our 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, leading courageously.

This four part e-Book addresses Leadership Courage. It is from a series of articles that were originally posted as blog entries on KirlinCoaching.com. 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.

Book Three addresses four ideas. The "normal" Christian life, as described in the New Testament, was above all, an adventure. The trust relationship between the Christian and her God was so central, so dynamic, and so pervasive that she was flung, by her faith, into a way of life that was exciting, surprising, and maturity-producing. The complete opposite of what's modeled and venerated in Church today. The notion that a tiny minority of people provide the vast majority of the produce of most any organization is not only true in contemporary Christendom, it's being powerfully and unwittingly reinforced by the actions of church leaders. We consider why this is and what can be done to undermine "80/20" in our churches. The claims of Christ were anything but reasonable. Yet, since the Reformation, Christian institutions have labored tirelessly to re-frame Christ, his call, and claims as so, so reasonable. In so doing, we've lost much of what made our faith compelling, important, and transformational.

Clergypersons today bear little resemblance to their biblical ancestors. Those who were called to lead, then as now, modeled a way of life characterized by bold risk, deep sacrifice, and honest trust. To become the kind of people who'll stand as cultural change-agents in society, Christians will be led by pastors who routinely model courageous, godly Christ-

followership. My prayer is that you and those you influence will be inspired to reinvent the way you embody your faith, in the presence of, and for the benefit of the multitudes who'll be watching.

As you will read, I am indebted to Edwin Friedman's seminal work: *A Failure of Nerve*. This book has inspired much of the thought behind what you'll read here. 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 to contact me and subscribe to my free email newsletter. I look forward to hearing from you!

The Adventurous Life (part one)

Where and when did the role of Pastor become so closely associated with the characteristics of *terrible leadership*: anemic, people-pleasing, comfort-oriented, weakness-honoring, safety-bound, consensus-collecting, approval-seeking, distress-abating caretaking?

How did we get from the decisive, principle-inspired boldness of Jesus with the money-changers [Mt 21], Paul and the riot in Ephesus [Ac 19], and Peter on the first Pentecost [Ac 2] to *this*?

How did we move from the frightening judgment of Ananias and Sapphira [Ac 5], the power of God resting on Stephen at his stoning [Ac 6], and the early church leaders arrested for “turning the world upside down” [Ac 17:6] to a religious experience so predictable, routinized, and boring that men of any age, and people under the age of 40 stay away in droves?



Maybe you saw the *Flo* TV ad that debuted in last February’s Super Bowl. Sports announcer Jim Nance voice-overs the sad spectacle of Jason Glasby being led around the lingerie department by his girlfriend. Nance says: “*Hello, friends. We have an injury report on Jason Glasby. As you can see, his girlfriend has removed his spine, rendering him incapable of watching the game.*”

I’m wondering about the injury report on the Church in North America. **Who has removed our spine?**

Over the last nine installments in this Leadership Courage series, five principles have been offered for pastors who find themselves leading amidst a culture of cowardice. 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._

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

Five: Don't "push on the rope": the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.

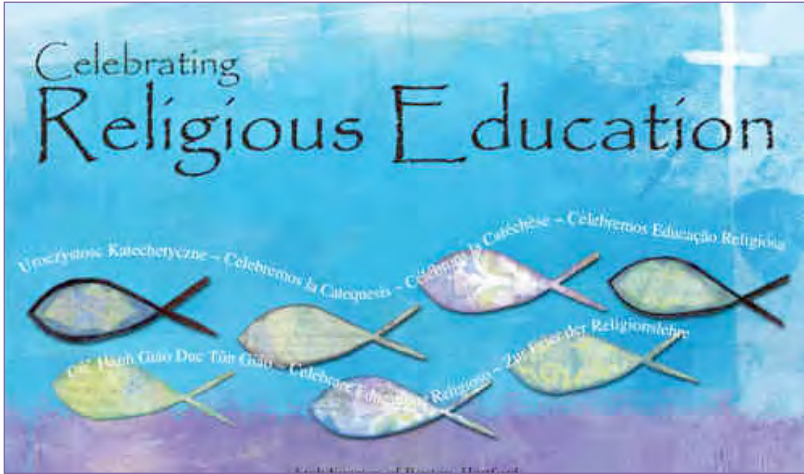
To this, we add a sixth: **Re-introduce yourself to *the adventurous life***. Edwin Friedman, in *A Failure of Nerve*, observes: "What our civilization needs most is



leaders with a bold sense of adventure... Our nation's obsession with safety ignores the fact that every American alive today benefits from centuries of risk-taking by previous generations...every modern benefit from health to enjoyment to production has come about because Americans in previous generations put adventure before safety."

Do you find incomprehensible the pathway from the behavior of the Church described in the Book of Acts and that of most any Sunday morning gathering in the US today?

How on earth did the Church get from vibrant, exciting, world overturning, status-quo challenging, Kingdom of God advancing powerhouse to predictable, regimented, backward-looking, tradition-bound, safety-dominant, repository of religious relics?



When were ministers of the Gospel transformed from courageous, God-trusting, whole-hearted, catalytic change agents to ... to ... well... providers of religious education and entertainment, chaplains of religious tradition, scholar-rhetoricians, and caregivers to those who claim to follow Christ?

What has become of *adventure*?

I'm not advocating that we risk for the thrill of it, that we put ourselves in harm's way for the emotional rush some get when they do dangerous things, or that we behave erratically just to break up the boredom. **I'm inviting you to the adventurous life for the advancement of God's reign and rule in your community.** This is not adventure for adventure's sake. It's returning to the biblically-normal life of risk and trust as we presence the way of Jesus in a culture more dark and desperate than any of us may fully appreciate.

The Adventurous Life

What an adventure it could be to...

trust Christ as you call people to distinctively demonstrate the way of Jesus to the world.

trust the Father as you lead your people *off the church campus* to love people and meet real needs right in your community.

trust the Holy Spirit as you confront sin so clearly and confidently those within your sphere of influence regain their capacity to blush. [Jer 6:15]

invite your people to take responsibility for their own well-being and destiny in Christ, serving *their* commitment to mature in Christ-likeness.

love your spouse so consistently and spectacularly that no one would wonder if the congregation had taken her spot in your heart.

break up whatever fallow ground there is in your own heart [Jer 4:3], to commit to love as if you've never been hurt [Lk 23:34], to reach to reconcile with those from whom you're now estranged [Rom 12:18]...and do it all in full view of your congregation, so they can learn to live like Jesus from your example as well as your preaching [1 Pt 5:3].

The Adventurous Life

What might be gained were you to love that elder enough to challenge the irritating and demeaning way he engages those around him?

What benefits could accrue if you were *really* to challenge your people to a lifestyle of financial sacrifice until it becomes the norm? What do you think we in the Church are perpetuating when 60-80% of long-time church attendees give **nothing** in return for the services and benefits they receive? When fewer than ten percent of Church members actually tithe? Why, I wonder, do we take pride in attendance numbers when *most* of those who come contribute neither time nor money to the welfare of the community of faith, let alone the waiting and watching community outside our doors?

The Adventurous Life

If you are in the religious education and entertainment business I can understand why you'd eschew adventure and risk. But, if you're in the people-development business, committed to make mature followers of Jesus, I'm not sure there's any other way.

The Adventurous Life (part two)

For the last eleven segments in a Leadership Courage Series that's now twenty installments in length we've been investigating the challenge facing pastors today to stand with courage and clarity in a religious context that, for decades -- maybe centuries -- has become less and less courageous and clear. In this spiritual vacuum the greater culture has drunk itself sick on self-focused indulgence.

Or, maybe you see it differently.

Last time, pastor, I invited you to **reintroduce yourself to the adventurous life**. A life of trust and risk and experimentation. Stepping beyond the natural limitations of your understanding, your competencies, your skill set, your own strength, intellect, and charisma.

Of course, the problem with living the adventurous life is, in the words of Patch Adams' love interest Carin Fisher: **"People get hurt"**.



And so it is with *any* adventure. There is the possibility of failure, of loss, of injury, of embarrassment, of being mistaken, and of hurt.

The Church today seems to have so little tolerance for the latter that it's unwilling to engage the former. And, this reality is absolutely *stunning* in light of the Biblical record. **The Christian life is *anything but* safe, cautious, predictable, measured, and reasonable. Everywhere in the Bible, those who followed God were *adventurers*.**



By contrast, imagine this scene: more than 5,000 have come out to the wilderness to hear Jesus speak. Eventually it dawns on the disciples

that if the crowds don't get something to eat, some of them will grow faint, maybe ill. When Jesus sees that all they have is five loaves and two fish, he pats the young boy on the head and exclaims: "Oh my gosh! We've gotta shut this meeting down *right now* so everyone can get home to eat and rest. From now on, we have to hold these gatherings where people can get plenty of nourishing, low-calorie food, refreshments and medical services...and schedule plenty of breaks so people don't over-extend themselves."

Consider this situation: Jesus is about to send the disciples out two-by-two. He gives them these instructions: "Be sure you take plenty of money with you and arrange your lodgings well in advance. When you enter into a new village, if they're happy you're there, stay briefly, so you don't wear out your welcome. And, if there's *any* resistance at all, leave quickly and quietly. For goodness sake, don't stir anything up!

Peter and John are hurrying to the temple past a crippled person begging. They avoid eye contact and, as they pass, simply shrug their shoulders. One is overheard telling the other: "So sad that the government doesn't take care of the indigent, isn't it?"



The disciples are attempting to cross the Galilee with Jesus asleep below deck. Ever cautious, they hug the shore *just in case* a storm appears. Sure enough, a storm does arise. Alarmed, they awaken Jesus who screams out: "Quick, hand me a lifejacket! We've *got to* get to shore right away! These waves will probably capsize us!

We must never travel by boat again. It is *just too dangerous!*"

Read through the Gospels, the Book of Acts, the Epistles and the entire Old Testament. You'll see God's people continually in peril. Sometimes, God tells them to do what's impossible—like instructing Gideon to shrink his armed forces *before* going to war against a far more formidable foe. Other times, God's people find themselves in circumstances where they've no hope but for a miracle. The Egyptian army chasing the Israelite slaves to the shores of the Red Sea, for example. **God keeps putting his people in *unreasonable* situations.** They keep ending up in circumstances where they *have to* trust God. Where they can't rely on themselves.

They're living *the adventurous life*.

The Adventurous Life (part three)

Why is the Christian life is such an adventure? What has your experience been, following hard after God, as best you know?

In my life, I repeatedly find myself in dilemmas that are completely beyond my ability. This was far less common before I surrendered my life to Christ.

Now, it seems, *the adventurous life* beacons everywhere.

It seems that God wants me in water just over my head—where I get to trust him as a way of life. Something inside urges me to sprint into the center of my untidy life and to look for God *there*, as my provision.

For example...



- As a consultant, while traveling to meet the board, elders, and staff of a conflicted church, I discover I've been completely misinformed about the severity of the situation into which I'm about to step. *All* that I've prepared for three days of meetings must be scrapped, and there's no time to adequately develop a new plan. I go anyway...

- While leading a Bible study, I'm summoned to the phone and learn my son has been in jail for two days, out of state, and unable to reach me. I book a flight to leave the next morning...
- Delivering groceries to the needy, I learn that a woman with whom we'd prayed has been cured of a severe infection. She insists that I go to see her friend. On the way, I learn that her friend is dying of brain cancer. We go anyway. I lay my hands on the woman's head and pray for her healing...
- Driving from church to a Father's Day celebration, traffic is inching past police cars and a fire engine positioned to block the view of drivers from a particularly gruesome accident. Glancing to my right I see the wreckage of a blue Mustang convertible...



It is the car my daughter and son were driving-- the car has flipped onto the hood, windshield flattened. There is no room for

any human to have survived. Driver and passenger must have been thrown from the car ... or decapitated.

There can be no other explanation.

Crying out to God, I jerk my car to the curb and sprint toward the shattered remains of Lauren's car...

- I'm shocked to learn that a massive sum of money is missing from a capital campaign. The only person with access to the funds is a nationally-respected executive with whom I'm scheduled to meet in the next few minutes. If the conversation doesn't go well, it could undermine my career. I go and raise the concern, head-on...



- While praying, I'm impressed by God (I think) to "deliver a message" to the Mayor. For the next several days, I endeavor to dismiss the thought as a ridiculous concoction of my overactive imagination. The longer I struggle, the stronger the conviction that I'm to make an appointment, sit down with the Mayor, and ask him a very specific question about the nature of his relationship with

God. I make the appointment, meet with the Mayor, and ask the question...

Paul says he *pressed on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him*. [Phil 3:12] **This "pressing on" suggests an ardor so intense, a struggle so severe, an exertion so demanding as to have required *his all*.** I wonder if our pursuit of Christ's calling to change our world would blanch in comparison to that of Paul.

Writing to the Church at Ephesus, about the ferocity of the spiritual struggle that is the Christian life, Paul penned: "*...and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand...*" [Eph 6:13b-14a] I understand this to mean: "**after you've given *everything* in you to stand, keep standing!**"



A friend who, for more than a decade, has championed me to live a life of bold, decisive action, says it this way: ***Throw yourself into the middle of the room, and see what God does with it!***

To *fully participate* in the life God has given us, knowing that in ourselves we're not enough, is to apprehend **the adventurous life**.

See you there!

Undermine the 80/20 Rule (part one)

Why is it that 20% of the people in our churches are doing **all** the giving, **all** the serving, and **all** the ministry?



What if we who lead have actually established the culture that reinforces 80/20?

What are we communicating such that the vast majority of church dwellers feel great about coming, taking, and contributing *nothing*?

And, though you're unaware of it, pastor, **what if this is exactly what you want?**

I invite you to ponder: what are you doing to perpetuate 80/20 in your congregation? And, since, according to Edwin Friedman in *A Failure of Nerve* "**No one has ever gone from slavery to freedom with the slaveholders cheering them on**" I fully expect to encounter your resistance to this claim: 80/20 is yet another evidence of ***the culture of cowardice*** that is alive and well in much of the American Church.

So, take a breath. Set your resistance aside, and gather your key leaders together. Lock yourselves in a conference room until you can **identify at least ten ways your church communications, culture, and leadership promote and preserve 80/20.**

Think about it.

One: what do we model when, every time the doors are open, a relative handful minister to the many who simply spectate?

When a thousand gather for "worship" what do they see?

One preaches.

Another one does announcements.



One or two run the soundboard, show the videos, dim the lights.

Maybe a dozen play instruments or sing in a worship band. Or, maybe you have an organist. *One* organist...and a soloist. A *solo* soloist.

A couple dozen function as greeters and ushers.

And, several dozen teach the children—but that happens elsewhere... out of sight of most of the adults.

What you model reinforces a culture in which very few do a whole lot and very many do next to nothing.

Don't they?

Two: what expectations are communicated to those who gather at the weekend services?

Park here.

Don't smoke in the building.

Sign in your kids. Take a pager.

Leave your coffee outside the sanctuary.

Give, if you're comfortable.

Take part in this class, that event, the other small group experience.

And... *please come back!*

You can boil down the "contract" you make with your folks this way: "Just come back and we'll take care of everything else."

And, if they come back, they do exactly what you've asked: *nothing*.

And this often goes on for years...



Three: how frequently and how clearly do you teach your congregation about giving?

Funny, isn't it? Jesus spoke *more* about money than any subject other than the Kingdom of God. Why? Because **what I treasure reveals my heart**. [Mt 6:21] Yet, most pastors *dread* speaking about finances. "People will think that *all* we care about is money" some of you say. So, you rarely teach the topic and how closely allied it is to all issues of the heart of your people...and yet **you think about money all the time**.

Don't you?

See, if you're in the business of packing the pews [what I call "**the religious education and entertainment business**"], you'll avoid all the topics that invite people to take offense (and reveal their values).

Isn't it strange that Jesus wasn't smart enough to remember this, since he addressed the topic so very, very often? In fact, if you study his behavior, you'll conclude that **keeping the crowds coming back wasn't nearly as important to Jesus as it is to us**.

What was Jesus' priority?

Why did Jesus say what he said? Why did he teach, tell the stories he told, and live among people the way he did? **I assert that Jesus was in the people-**



development business. Jesus was making *Kingdom citizens* of people. And, when it happened, those people lived in *very distinct* ways.

"Discipleship", to Jesus, had everything to do with *how people live*, and *why* they do what they do. The heart-posture and motivation of one's actions. **Discipleship began with the renovation of the heart... and that heart-posture expressed itself in a way-of-being in the world that was... well, remarkable.** [Acts 16:7]

Yet, in North America, church dwellers' way-of-being in society seems *anything but remarkable*.

Doesn't it?

Funny, too, that when pastors teach about finances, giving almost always *increases*... at least for a time.

Ever wondered why cults get a following? I offer that one reason is that they communicate *clear and challenging expectations* of their followers. *Very rigorous expectations*. Misguided, often. Theologically corrupt as well. Yet, people by the thousands “pony up” whatever is required.

Maybe the cult leaders *abuse* the scriptures that you *avoid*...

Still, Jesus said: “*If anyone will come after me, he (or she) must take up their cross daily and follow me.*” [Mt 16:24, Mk 8:34] Yet, such preaching is rarely heard in the mamby-pamby, keep-‘em-coming-back Church of our day.

I wonder what prices we pay, as a result.

I wonder what prices America is paying.

Don't you?

Undermine the 80/20 Rule (part two)

We're looking at another characteristic of the ***culture of cowardice*** that's become normative in North American Christianity: the 80/20 Rule is flourishing! As senior pastor, elder, or lay leader, what can you do to **Undermine the 80/20 Rule** in your congregation?



One: Think like a people-developer, not a gatherer of passive spectators. Re-think why you're in Christian ministry.

Decide to jettison the notion—promoted by almost three hundred years of post-enlightenment Church culture—that your role *primarily* is to educate and entertain church dwellers.

Instead, become *primarily* a disciple-maker and maturity-provoker. When your purpose is to catalyze people to live like Jesus, so much of the activity that fills and frustrates your workweek will change.

Think about it.

What if your senior staff took 80% of the hours it devotes to preparing for and pulling off a slick service — an education and entertainment event — and dedicated that time to imagining ways to provoke *Christ-likeness* in your people?

What if you became *trainers, coaches, and equippers* rather than event planners and show producers?

What experiences would support your people's growth into maturity?

- What skills would you *be sure* to have them practice: discerning God's voice, praying for others effectively, listening well, etc?
- What would you have them role play: communicating parts of their Christ-story so as to connect with a variety of people in any number of life



situations, responding biblically to universal ethical and moral challenges, selecting appropriate scriptures that might support people facing common difficulties, life experiences, and perplexities?



- What field trip experiences would be core to your disciple-making process: serving those outside the church who are culturally similar to your trainee, volunteering with secular service organizations, interviewing community leaders about the true needs of neighboring residents [police officials, mayor's office, school administrators, YWCA director, city council members].
- How would you insure that your people applied whatever you teach them when you do an education event? What pathways can you pave in advance of your weekend education event so that every person could take action in line with their new learning?



Two: Stop counting the numbers of spectators who amass at your weekend events.

Fix your attention on those who are making a difference for Christ.

Decide what maturing in Christ looks like in your context: serving the un-churched, giving sacrificially of one's money, time, and talents, etc. Count those who live

this way. Those who contribute, who serve, who minister *outside* as well as inside the church.

Count *only* those who do.

Focus on *their* progress. Use *them* as examples when you teach and train. Make *them* your congregation's visible heroes.

Pay attention to their growth. Who among them is *God* stretching, growing, maturing, strengthening?

What are the experiences that seem to contribute to the development of their character, confidence in ministry, trust in Christ, and tenderness of heart?



What can you, as a senior leadership team do, to provoke your people to love and good works? [Heb 10:24]

And, while you're doing that, wean yourself off your fixation with how many *attend* this or that. To undermine the 80/20 rule, **stop yourself from caring about how many come and listen... to you.** Stop asking about how many came and sat and took and left.

Three: Innovate ways to involve everyone, every time. A *lot* of people come to my church, seven services a weekend, I think. So ... what if, routinely in our services, we grouped people and asked them to find someone in the group with whom they discover they have something in common, then turn that common ground into prayer?

What if our greeters grabbed the first ten strangers who walked in, and asked them to help greet our guests?

What if our ushers randomly asked people to help them?

What if our trained prayer team picked a handful of people to whom they gave *one minute* of prayer training, then had them come alongside and assist when praying for others?

What if every ministry team, the weekend before they do some local ministry, randomly ask people in the service to come and do it with them? What if they kept asking until 15 people agreed to come and help?

What if you made it clear that your church is a community where, from day one, everyone gives.

Where everyone contributes.

Where everyone plays.

What if giving, and contributing, and playing is how mature disciples are made?

Undermine the 80/20 Rule (part three)

Here's a final look at the 80/20 Rule and its connection to the ***culture of cowardice*** in the North American Church. And, it may be hard to hear.

Could it be that a distorted substitute for biblical grace has taken the Church?

Consider how little the Church asks of Christians... in the name of "grace".

And, consider the abundance of resources we make available *to Christians* who are expected to contribute nothing in return. Churches, in general, are so transfixed with providing for their own that they have little time, energy, and resources with which to serve the un-churched.

Think about how much time and energy the Church spends on *itself*:

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Baby dedications. | Baptisms. |
| Child care. | Mom's nights out. |
| Children's ministry. | Men's breakfasts. |
| Youth group. | Relationship counseling. |
| Women's teas. | Extravagant holiday productions. |
| College and career ministry. | Pre-marital classes. |
| Weddings. | Marriage counseling. |
| Divorce recovery. | Grief counseling. |
| Financial management seminars. | Debt counseling. |
| Bereavement care. | Memorial services. |

Our churches provide cradle-to-grave services to the saved--- most of which are free of any call that the recipients contribute their time, energy, or money to the community of faith from which they take, take, take.

Is it any wonder that fewer than 10% of church-dwellers *tithe*?

Ever attended a church while it undertook a major capital campaign? What happened?

For a capital campaign to succeed, two things have to occur: **those who already give must dig deep and give more—usually a *lot* more—and they often do. And also, those who rarely give and who only *gesture* at giving are called upon to sacrifice as well**—and there's where the commotion commences...

Doesn't it?

A capital campaign--like the claims of Lordship that Jesus so clearly articulates--calls each of us to painful sacrifice. In Matthew 10:38, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, and 14:27 the gospels record Jesus' clearly: ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."***

Yet, in our commitment to be visitor-sensitive, we communicate in dozens of ways that cross-bearing is optional. Not expected. And, certainly not insisted upon. And then, **when we finally call our people – all of them – to get in the game in a sacrificial way, many of them pack up and leave** for another church. Or, no church at all.

Don't they?

And, look where all this visitor-sensitivity has got us. **Do you see maturing disciples all around you?**



Do you?

My friends were approved by Habitat for Humanity a number of years ago. Working the graveyard shift in a manufacturing plant, driving a cab, and doing odd jobs whenever he could still wouldn't provide the down payment my buddy would need to own a home.

Habitat, however, has a pathway to home ownership.

Richard and his wife Jackie, donated their time – lots of it – to help other Habitat recipients build their homes over a period of years. Then, when the time came to work on *their* home, dozens of others were there to help out.

Many of us who love them pitched in as well. It was a blast. Rewarding. Resourceful. Empowering. Richard and Jackie had "skin in the game". They got far more than a home. **They invested themselves in *their* home in a way that changed *them*.**

Why doesn't Habitat just hand out homes? They could. They could use a lottery system to select the fortunate



few who'd get a nice new Habitat house for free. But they don't.

Know why?



Because, getting a house for free doesn't mature people.

Doesn't develop character. Strengthen confidence. Shift one's self-perception. Not really. Not like Richard and Jackie's did.

Pastor, if you're in the disciple-making business then you're in the business of changing people.

Changing people into the image of Christ. Provoking people to live and love and give and care and serve the way Jesus did—motivated by what motivated him.

And, that rarely happens when you keep handing people fish.

You might have read, back in installment #16, I was struggling my way through a character-development workshop in Honolulu with Dan, my trainer and mentor. Dan's life-changing counsel:

Kirk, we're not here to *give* people fish.

We're not here to *teach* them to fish.

We're here to *provoke their hunger!*

Are you?

The Unreasonableness of Being Reasonable (part one)

For a number of months we've been looking at Christian leadership from what I hope are refreshing and resourceful perspectives. The genesis of this entire series is *A Failure of Nerve* by the late Edwin Friedman. I am again indebted to him for sparking today's thoughts with his charge to "***disengage from an unreasonable faith in reasonableness.***"

Pastor, after all the years of disappointments, setbacks, and betrayals in your experience as both minister and disciple, have you become reasoned, balanced, measured, composed in the application of your faith?

Has your Christianity become, somehow, affordable?

I wonder how this impacts those you seem impotent to inspire? We are, after all, talking about leading with courage...



If the Christian faith is but one among many, then a sensibly reasonable approach to applying its teachings is appropriate.

If Christianity is but one philosophy among many, holding your faith as you do your political convictions, is understandable.

If church involvement is but one of several "membership

commitments" then it is wise to be reasoned in your investment therein.

The thing is, **Christianity cannot be *any* of these**, for *any* of us.

If it is but one among many *anything* -- then it is a lie.

A falsehood.

A hoax.

The reasonable thing to do with a thing like *that*, is to have nothing to do with it.

The claims of Christ are so radical, singular, and exclusive they can only stand alone. Without rival in any of our lives.

So, Christian, the seminal question is: **Is it true?**

If Jesus Christ is the completely unique Son of God... the way, the truth, and the life... the only route to the Father... the One in whom the fullness of God dwells... then to be reasonable in your commitment to your faith is the most unreasonable thing you could ever do.



To be reasonable in your commitment to Christ is the most unreasonable thing you could ever do.

And to be unreasonable in your commitment to Jesus and His Church is the most reasonable thing you could ever do.

No *reasonable* person can declare “**For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.**” [Phil 1:21] Right?

Maybe you rationalize: “That was Paul. *The Apostle* Paul. Heck, he wrote half the New Testament. Paul’s was a highly unusual commitment to Christ and Christianity.”

Yet, Paul was either crazy or he *fully expected* the Christians in Philippi to do the same thing he did, with their lives.

Didn’t he?

Paul, like Jesus, was no reasonable person.

Gripped at his core, from his core, to his core with the unreasonableness of faith, everything Paul wrote and modeled indicated a radical, all-in embrace of faith.

All-in.

Are you?

The Unreasonableness of Being Reasonable (part two)

Edwin Friedman in his stellar work *A Failure of Nerve* challenges his readers to **“disengage from an unreasonable faith in reasonableness.”** It seems that the Church in North America is reasonable if it is anything, and that reasonableness has got us stuck.

“Syncretism” is what scholars call it.

I call it a blight ... and a foundation to the ***culture of cowardice*** that’s commonplace in the Church today. One way to regain our verve and our nerve, it to take an axe to the roots of a commitment to being reasonable.

Trouble is, there’s comfort in reasonableness. There’s a degree of security there, too. The moderation it provokes can masquerade as wisdom after you’ve had any number of flame-outs when taking bold steps of faith.

I was discipled as a new Christian in a church that regularly twisted scripture and abused power ... scarring people both emotionally and spiritually. Annie and I invested ourselves without reservation in a church plant that imploded after an extra-marital affair. Years ago we gave what *for us* was a breathtaking sum of money for a church building campaign, and later learned that a person on the inside had misappropriated tens of thousands from that campaign.

Sad.

If you’ve been around the Church for any time, such scandals are nothing new. How the perpetrators can sleep at night remains a mystery to me. **What is not mysterious is the pressure these setbacks have exerted on my enthusiasm to live “all-in” for Christ.** It’s *as if* powerful spiritual forces conspire to soften and weaken my commitment to live boldly for Christ.

They do.

A “voice of reason” resonates inside my head coaxing me to be moderate. One prevailing Christian paradigm suggests that we hold our faith as we would a country club membership or allegiance to a political party: one of many important commitments. Important, sure, but not essential.

Nothing to lose your head over.

Yet, in the scriptures, moderation in living for Christ is never esteemed.

Who was moderate?

Peter in Caiaphas' courtyard?

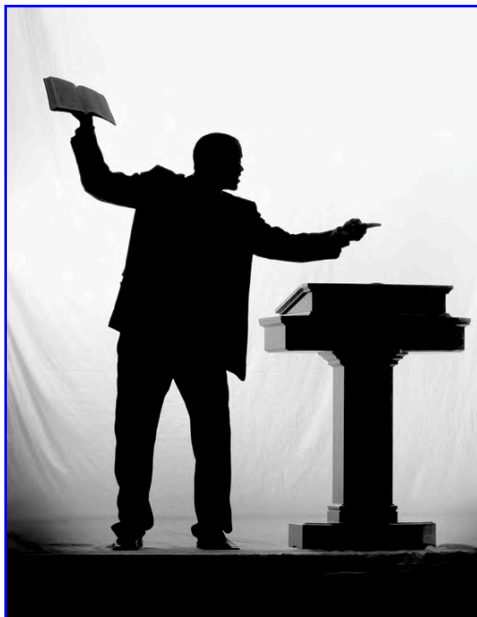
Thomas, before he believed?

Judas Iscariot?

Jesus is unambiguous: *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.* [Lk 9:23]

Clear as a bell.

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other... [Lk 16:13]



As a leader, **who you are** is more important than anything you say.

Who you are is more important than ***everything*** you say.

Ministers, often times, are master pulpiteers.

Skilled rhetoricians.

Gifted orators.

Big talkers.

But talk that's not backed by a life has a hollow ring. And that hollowness drives people away... away from

church... away from *the* Church.

When Winston Churchill addressed the Harrow School in late October 1941 his speech included these most famous words: "***Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never--in nothing, great or small, large or petty--never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the***



apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

His words, then as now, ring true.

Why?

Because ***he didn't give in.***

Neville Chamberlain, the famous appeaser could never have made this speech. If he had, it would never have been remembered.



The words didn't match his life.

Do yours?

The Unreasonableness of Being Reasonable (part three)

Pastor, *who you are* is more important than anything you say.

Who you are is more important than everything you say!

This *Leadership Courage Series* is a call to the courageous, risky life leaders lived in the Church of the New Testament. It stands in glaring contrast to the lifestyle of the professional clergy that, more often than not, resembles tenured professors at our nation's universities...without the taxpayer-funded salary package.

This is primarily troubling because you are *not* primarily an educator... you are a role model.

Just like Timothy, Paul, Priscilla & Aquila, Barnabas, John, and Stephen.

Yes, *just like* them.

If not you, then who?

Who else is to model the vibrant, sold-out Christian life than you, your elders, and leaders?

Those who write books, like those who traverse the Christian speaking circuit, don't provide the regular proximity and access that you, as shepherd of a local congregation, do-- unless you hide in your study and only emerge when it's time to preach or run a meeting.

Think about those words: **proximity and access.**

If the lyrics and music of your preaching and your life don't align, those words will strike fear in you.

If, however, you've raised your way-of-living to match your preaching or lowered your preaching to that which you actually live, those words will resonate with your heart right now.





See, when your life is “Chamberlainian” [see last week’s blog], the dissonance between it and the biblical message undercuts your effectiveness as a leader of God’s women and men.

And, when your living is “Churchillian”, the bravery to which you call your congregation is the same as the courage you routinely summon to bring God’s reign to the chaos and disorder that has besieged your community.

One of my all-time favorite preachers is Mike Erre. Mike’s always been an amazing Bible expositor and communicator. Biblically-sound. Funny. Profound. Engaging. Illuminating. Winsome.

In recent years, a medical crisis has befallen someone *very* dear to Mike and Justina. A crisis from which there’s no recovery. None.

Mike’s preaching gained *gravitas*. Like Jesus had, when the scholars marveled at his understanding [Lk 2:47] and demons quaked in his presence [Mk 5:7]. You can *sense it* when you’re around Mike. This man knows what it is to follow Jesus ***no matter what***.

When you live in harmony with the Biblical message, you have gravitas.

Weight.

Substance.

Authenticity.

So does your preaching.

When you don't, your sermons are hollow. And that hollowness drives folks away.

Some of the first to go are the true believers. The uncompromising. The bold. The spirited. The gutsy. Those who read their Bibles and believe that it says what it says. That it means what it means.

The people who long for authenticity. Not theory. **They want to associate with a faith community that will *live* this stuff – Jesus' stuff – like it's real.** Because it is.

It is.

Isn't it?

The Unreasonableness of Being Reasonable (part four)

Within a larger conversation concerning ***courageous leadership*** we've been examining the outworking of placing "*an unreasonable faith in reasonableness*" – a central tenet of much of post-Enlightenment Christendom in the West. I am indebted to Edwin Freidman's *A Failure on Nerve* for illuminating this characteristic of the anxious, shallow, quick-fix orientation to leadership.

This kind of leadership is *ruining* the Church in North America in our time.

We've pointed out that when you preach what you don't practice, the dissonance repels people – not just from your sanctuary – but from Christianity and Christ. The implications for a society are deeply profound and can infect it for generations.

See, Christianity is nothing if not a call to courage. When her leaders bow before the idol of reasonableness, a dry, humdrum philosophical religion results.



And, men leave the church in droves.

Or haven't you noticed?

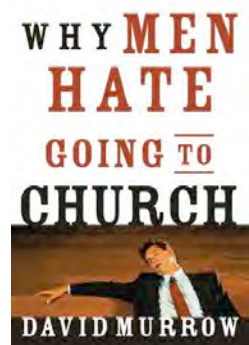
I subscribe to an excellent book reading service called **Leader's Book Summaries** [www.StudyLeadership.com]. I *highly* recommend it. In a recent summary of David Murrow's *Why Men Hate Going to Church* I learned

that **only one third of church attendees are men**—and most of them are over 50. It's almost impossible to find adults – of either gender -- under age 30 in church.

How come?

Consider these two lists of values: First, the pink list: **Love, communication, beauty, relationships, support, help, nurture, feelings, sharing, harmony, community, and cooperation.**

And, the green list: **Competence, power, efficiency, achievement, skills, results, accomplishment, technology,**



goals, success, and competition.

Which list of values are most consistent with the culture that predominates the North American Church today?

The two lists come from John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* and distinguish culturally "masculine" from "feminine" values.

What do you see?



In our commitment to be reasonable, among other major shifts, the Church in the west has been

emasculated. Neutered. No. Frankly, it's been feminized.

The *Leaders Book Summary* points out that numerous studies reveal **"there is widespread agreement among both the religious and the secular that to be a Christian is to embrace feminine values."**

Consider this: **those most absent from church (men and young adults) value challenge over security.** Again, taken from the *Summary*, the key values of this missing population include adventure, risk, daring, independence, variety, and reward.

Women and seniors are more likely to embrace safety, stability, harmony, predictability, comfort, support, and tradition as core values.



Since values are revealed in behavior, not belief systems, what does your lifestyle reveal, pastor?

When the time has come to take a courageous stand, what does *your* behavior reveal?

- When the opportunity came to stand up to that manipulative, obstructionist power-wielding elder, what did you do?
- When you thought to lead your parish out into the city to serve and love and impact those outside your tight-knit congregation – and push-back came, *as it always does* – did you lead courageously or cave-in under pressure?
- When a clear biblical injunction has become as unpopular in your denomination as in the culture at large, have you censored your own voice?
- When the Holy Spirit stirred you to put your hand to the plow in pursuit of some great, challenging work for God’s glory, did the fearful complaints of the cowards prevail in the end?

As leaders, we get to champion our people to become who they always wanted to be, by taking them where they never wanted to go.

And, since **life is always lived from now on**, your past behavior is no predictor of the greatness you’ll accomplish before you breathe your last.

So, before you see Him face to face, what great, rewarding, daring adventure will you and your people give yourselves to?

What’ll it be?

You get to choose.

Go First! (part one)

Could you imagine the impact of a largely *leaderless Church* for, say, 400 years? Well, look around...

We're heading for the home stretch on this examination of courageous Christian leadership. The impetus for my challenges and observations is Edwin Friedman's wonderful book: *A Failure of Nerve*. Thus far, we've made eight observations about leadership amidst a culture of cowardice:

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.*

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

Five: *Don't "push on the rope": the unmotivated are invulnerable to insight.*

Six: *Undermine the 80/20 Rule.*

Seven: *Reintroduce yourself to the adventurous life.*

Eight: *Disengage an unreasonable faith in reasonableness.*

This brings us to the ninth principle: *Go first.*

Ever wonder what happened to the Church the Apostle Paul envisioned in Ephesians chapter four? A Church in which the saints are the "ministers".

Paul is clear:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... and become mature... Then we will no longer be infants... Instead... we will grow to become in every respect the mature body... the whole body... grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. [Eph 4:11-16]

In Paul's conception, Christ gives ministers to the church to train, develop, and equip them to minister, to mature in every respect, and to w-o-r-k.

Leade



What have we had, almost universally, since the Reformation?

Religious educators who teach and teach and teach the saints who sit and sit and sit while they learn and learn and learn.

What's missing?

The saints serving.

The body maturing.

Every part working.

Now here's a shock. What if the culprit is not so much the laziness and lethargy of the saints but the focus and function of the clergy?

See, Christ himself gave apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching gifts to equip his Church for maturity and ministry.



Yet, since the Enlightenment, Seminary is the route to ministry for most. What do our Seminaries produce? An overwhelming super-abundance of pastor-teachers.

Period.

Imagine a softball team in which all nine positions are played by catchers. Very well equipped catchers.

Can you see it?

Catcher's glove. Catcher's mask. Shin pads. The whole get up.

Now, put that catcher on the mound and ask her to pitch... Put her in left to run down a deep fly ball... Or, at short to turn a ground ball into a double play.

This is the Church in the West today.

What do teaching-gifted ministers produce?

People who learn lots of things, *important things*, and not much else.



I'm not denigrating the teaching gift. I'm denigrating the notion of the teaching-only ministry. I'm inviting *you* to look at the results of recurring generations of pastor/teacher-dominant ministry in the West.

Are you impressed by what *you* see?

Go First! (part two)

To the Church at Ephesus, Paul wrote: So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... **Yet, since the Reformation, the Church in the West has been dominated almost exclusively by those with the pastor-teacher gift.**

It shows.



What do you miss when apostolic grace is missing from the Church?

An apostle is a “sent-one”. Walk into the dozen churches closest to your home and send the members out into the community to minister there. Call them to establish the Kingdom reign and rule of God out there. Challenge them to pioneer fresh and meaningful

expressions of ministry that make sense to the prevailing culture -- outside their walls.

The Christians in those churches will look at you like you’re nuts! And the longer they’ve been “churched” the more *aghast* they will be. If they’ve been in church their entire lives, their *incredulity* will be nearly insurmountable.

Why?

The religious culture in which they’ve been steeping has been training them to be scandalized by the assertion that they’re supposed to minister regularly, routinely, naturally, and passionately among those who are not followers of the Christian way. The culture believes that’s what ministers are paid for. “Ministers minister. We come and sit and listen and *sort of* tithe...”

Trust me on this.

I’m close to a few Senior Pastors who challenged their people in just this way --- and the power brokers who control their



elder boards --- ran the pastors out. Out of the church. Out of town. Out of pastoral ministry.

A tragedy.

It is heartbreaking for the pastors. It's far more disastrous for the congregations left behind, mired in meaningless maintenance of impotent programs and life-sapping control. **The greatest catastrophe, however, is for those the Church continues ignore**, insulating them from what would have been provocative demonstrations of Christ's transformative presence in their midst.

They just go to Hell.

Does this remind you, at all, of Jesus' words: *"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either."* [Mt 23:13 NLT]

See, the apostolic impetus ignites action. It generates ground-breaking innovation. It leads change. It is consumed with whatever could *expand the reach and impact of the Kingdom of God*. The apostolic is risk-taking, not safety-centered. Its orientation is *forward*.

Forward looking.

Forward leaning.

Forward moving.



Teaching is valuable in so much as it produces Christ-honoring Kingdom advance. In individuals. In congregations. And in society.

Christ gave the apostolic to the Church for her effectiveness.

And, where it's missing, minimized, or marginalized, you get, well... you get what we've got today.

Go First! (part three)

We're looking at a ninth characteristic of courageous Christian leadership. A leader moves. She takes action. **Rather than taking a straw poll to see what the prevailing opinions are, a leader will go first.** And sometimes this means going alone... for a while.



It's nothing special.

It's what *leaders* do.

As we investigate going first, we're reminded that Christ gave three distinct ministry gifts to the church: apostle, prophet, and evangelist to compliment that of the pastor-teacher [Eph 4:11]. Yet, since the Reformation, pastor-teachers have been leading in a vacuum. **The overemphasis on shepherding and teaching has produced both the Church and the society that we have today.**

Going first, I assert, includes restoring the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic graces to Christian leadership. Last time we considered the apostolic; what it brings to leadership and what's lost when it's absent.

So, what becomes of the Church when the prophetic is marginalized?

You get an indistinct, mushy, shallow, and disingenuously "nice" message week after week. The trumpet blows an uncertain sound. [1 Cor 14:8]



Sounds kinds like American Christianity, doesn't it?

And where there's no prophetic voice, there's no distinctively Christian lifestyle either. ***Sin can thrive in an atmosphere like that.***

And, it does.

Doesn't it?

The prophetic grace brings clarity when the church and her leaders wobble and wander. The prophetic



brings courageous correction. It is the scalpel that cuts between the diseased and the healthy tissue around it. It provides a clear word from God (or from God's Word) when the Church is blurring the lines of biblical acuity.

Think about Nathan's role in the life of King David [2 Sam 12:1-14]. Where might David's arrogance, selfishness, and entitlement have taken him were it not for the timeliness, the clarity and the strength of the prophet's rebuke? When you mix the kind of power that many ministry leaders have with their human frailty disaster often results. When it does, innocents are hurt and the veracity of the Christian faith is undermined.

What if the prophetic voice was just as visible, authoritative, and influential in the Church in North America as the pastor-teacher has been? Imagine if they stood side-by-side to mature the Church and to improve her efficacy in society.



Which of the high profile scandals might have been avoided?

More imperative, how much more mature, godly, and authentically Christian might the Church be today?

Allow yourself to consider the moral, spiritual, and ethical condition of American society if the prophetic had been as influential as the shepherd-teacher has for the last couple hundred years.

"Christ gave some to be apostles and some to be prophets, etc..."

Since Christ has given them to the Church, don't you wonder where they are?

Go First! (part four)

In the home stretch of this Series, we're considering the ninth characteristic of those who would lead well in a culture overrun with cowardice. Early in this series we examined why comfort-craving, security-seeking, spiritless stagnation is common to the Church. Sad, when you consider how we behaved in the Book of Acts.

Isn't it?

Christ gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of their ministry. [Eph 4:11-16] Strange, though, for several generations there's been almost no evidence of the first three of these essential graces in the North American Church. One quality of "going first" is to restore these missing graces in every church.

What's the impact on the Church is when the evangelistic impetus is in scant supply?

Seriously, look around...



Because of the preponderance of the teaching grace, you get a dysfunctional over-emphasis on teaching as *the means of evangelism*.

See, when you keep trying to *teach* those who are not postured to learn you create an experience in those you're with. That experience is irritation, annoyance, condescension, and frustration.

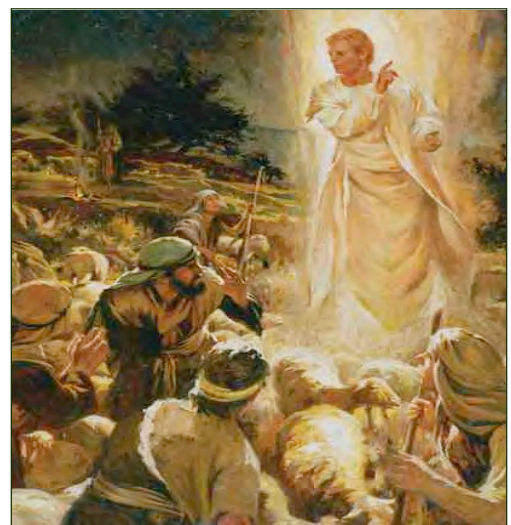
And, this we do in the name of Jesus.

The second thing you get is a dearth of actual "evangels".

At the heart of "evangelism" is "angel".

An angel is a messenger.

An "ev-angel" is a messenger of good.



And a message is “good” when those who receive it define it that way.

Think about it. What was the angels’ message at the first advent? “Turn or burn!” “Close this clinic!” “Vote for my candidate!”

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today ... a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah...Glory to God ... and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” [Lk 2:11-14] However that message might be interpreted today, **it meant something really good** to the Hebrew people enslaved by Roman oppression in that hour.

Our society thinks it has heard our “evangel” and they’ve judged it as anything but “good news”.

They think they’ve heard enough from us—people they’ve decided are rigid, judgmental, hypocritical bigots who oppose many of the darlings of what is considered to be progressive, enlightened culture. And, **since we’ve reduced Christian ministry to explanation and oration, we keep trying to teach them the right way to think, believe, and act.**

Did Jesus do it this way?

Consider the *Campaign of Nain*, recorded in Luke 7:11-17. Jesus approaches the town, sees a funeral procession, a widow weeping over the death of her child, and a lot of people in despair.

What does he do?

As he sizes up the situation, his heart goes out to her. He walks up, touches the casket, raises the boy to life, and hands him to his mother.

That’s it!

No altar call.

No self-promotion.

No commercial about Sunday’s meetings on Solomon’s Colonnade.

He doesn’t tell them to *do anything*. Jesus brings the Kingdom and people are blessed. Here, he is



a messenger of good.

And they all get it.

Their conclusion: “God has come to help his people.”

Is that what they conclude when you and I come to town??

Go First! (part five)

As with much of this Leadership Courage Series, I'm indebted to Edwin Friedman's excellent book *A Failure of Nerve* for this ninth and final leadership trait: **Go first!**

Friedman says "To be a leader, one must both have and embody a vision of where one wants to go. It is not a matter of knowing or believing one is right; it is a matter of taking the first step."

Leaders go first.

They just do.

And when they don't, they fail to lead.

You may be an educator, an encourager, a chaplain, an historian, a counselor, an entertainer, a soother, or a caretaker, but *you are not a leader.* And, leadership is essential for the Church to be the Church.

If you watched the HBO miniseries *The Pacific* you've seen the difference. One



episode features the grizzly beach landing by US Marines on Peleliu. Before the landing craft can unload their fresh batch of rookie soldiers they come under

devastating fire. Soldiers are hit while still on the craft. Deafening planes strafe just overhead, bombs falling.

Bedlam.

Dizzying. Disorienting. Soldiers reaching the beach freeze in fear as mortars and bullets take down their companions. The wounded scream, some writhing, others whimpering.

Then, over the din of the guns and the bombs you hear just a few voices. They are clear, confident, urgent voices.

Officers giving directions.

Compared to the rookies, they seem almost unconcerned about their own safety. Their focus is not dodging bullets or ducking when a bomb explodes. Their focus is the mission. They urge their marines to get up and move—in the face of fear. *“You want to live? Get off the beach and move!”*



Leaders lead by going first.

Politicians in our day are known to modify their message and methods based on polling data. Seems to me, their concern is not “what’s right?” but “what’ll work?”

This is what passes for leadership in a culture of cowardice. Friedman notes that American society has become obsessed with safety. Our culture has become chronically anxious. We have lost our appetite for adventure.

Leadership, in a context like this, is in scant supply.



Recently, the leadership of a church in Virginia publicly apologized for mishandling sexual abuses perpetrated by a youth minister.

Their attorneys and insurance carrier went nuts.

Admit to anything and you open yourself to lawsuits... maybe dozens.

It was a major national news story particularly because ***the leaders of that church did lead***—with integrity. They did what was right because it was right, whether it worked or not.

They led.

Or, as Friedman says: They took the first step.

Will you?

Go First! (part six)

Last time, I used the phrase “**do what’s right because it’s right, whether it works or not.**” I learned this from a friend, who says he learned it from the Lord. His wife had lost both her parents to cancer. One after the other. Suddenly. Unexpectedly.

The impact was devastating. She was always the strong one for her parents and siblings. Amazing everyone, she stood like Gibraltar: an emotional and spiritual fortress in a storm of incalculable ferocity.



But, after the second funeral her scaffolding rocked, then teetered, and collapsed. When it did, my friend found himself in court-ordered isolation.

Banished from his home, his wife, and his children.

With tears in his eyes, Tom promised me that he’d do what was right for his wife, *because* it was right, whether it “worked” or not.

Whether he’d ever be able to move home. Ever hold his wife again. Ever have a meal at with his children at their table.

Leaders go first. Which means they *do* GO. Leaders move into the unknown. They realize they cannot afford to wait until there’s no risk left. **Guided by their values and attending to their functioning moral compass, they move.**

This is what Tom chose to do. To respond tenderly, mercifully, patiently, lovingly, forgivingly, kindly. While facing a great threat to his and his family’s future. There was no MapQuest with navigation instructions. No one he knew had faced something like this. Nothing about it made sense.



It didn’t have to.

His commitment was *to do right* by his wife.

Courageous leaders have learned to govern themselves, to manage their emotional reactivity, to restrain their impulsivity.

Like, the impulse for revenge. To employ terrorist tactics. Or zero-sum strategies. And the ever-present impulse **to resist another's resistance**.

Instead, she surrenders herself to integrity. Her integrity. And, she entrusts herself to God, being obedient, as best she can, to what she knows to be right.

Right?

A Christian leader cannot afford to be capricious, impetuous, or mercurial. If they are, those they lead cannot follow. And, leaders are only leaders *when* people follow them.

It's incumbent upon leaders in the Church to do what we know to be right. Because, when we don't, we compromise ourselves. **When you compromise your own integrity, you commit *moral* suicide.**

When you fail to do what you know to be right, you immediately lose esteem for yourself. The antidote to low self-esteem is not the empty pumping up of those who live without integrity. **It is to live a life that you yourself esteem.** That you respect. To quote my friend Tom, you do what's right.

One tragedy of Christian leadership in our day is that far too many suffer from this malady. **Collapsing on what they know to be right, the erosion of esteem begins its inexorable advance.**

Confidence is undermined.

One collapse breeds another.



Compromised, the leader looks outside to determine direction. Like the politician taking cues from polling data, she's straining to sense the political winds rather than standing on the moral certitude of doing what's right.

The question is no longer “what’s *right?*” but “what’ll *work?*” And, **adrift of one’s ethical moorings, the tragedies mount up.**

Don’t they?

And, *this* is what passes for leadership in a culture of cowardice.

What if the Church in our nation determined to do what we know to be right, simply because it *is* right? What if honor and integrity supplanted expediency and political advantage?

How might we then live?

How might our society respond?