

COMMUNITY LEADER QUALIFICATIONS

THE VISION

Being a community group leader is one of the most significant positions of servant leadership at Watermark. As part of the shepherding structure of Watermark, community group leaders are essentially lay pastors of their groups, serving to lead their “church within a church.” As such, leading a community group should be considered the leader’s primary area of service at Watermark. Any other serving opportunities should be evaluated in light of whether they would hinder this responsibility.

ASK/EXPECTATIONS

- Weekly time commitment: ~4-6 hours
- Length of commitment: Minimum of 1 year
- Reporting relationship: Assigned Coach or Director

BE A MODEL OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY

- Exhibit an excitement about and commitment to the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:18-20*) and the Great Commandment (*Matthew 22:36-40*)
- Understand and incorporate the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life (*1 Timothy 4:7*)
- Have a growing and abiding walk with God (*John 15:4-5*)
- The leader must have no current habitual struggles or moral issues (drugs, alcohol, sexual purity etc.) that would disqualify them from leading at the present time, or prevent them from serving with integrity as a role model of Christian maturity and conduct (*1 Corinthians 11:1*)
- Live a life of integrity that is above reproach (*Ephesians 5:7-10, Proverbs 10:17*)
- The leader must be a member at Watermark Community Church. (*Hebrews 13:17*)

BUILD INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH GROUP MEMBERS

- Proactively pursue your group members
- Facilitate the growth of relationships among group members within your group

LEAD AND FACILITATE YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP

- Prepare for and lead weekly (or bi-weekly for marrieds) Community Group meetings
- Facilitate group discussion of curriculum content, helping group members to grow in their knowledge of and love for God
- Share your struggles openly with the group to encourage mutual trust and authenticity
- Identify and intentionally develop 1-2 apprentice leaders during the first 12 months of your group

PASTORAL CARE & SHEPHERDING

- Help group members love and support one another with biblical counsel and care
- Elevate major issues or group crisis to your Coach or Director

PARTICIPATE IN ONGOING LEADER TRAINING & EQUIPPING

- Attend all Base Camp training sessions, community group training nights, and Better Together
- Faithfully attend the ongoing Coach/Leader huddle with your coach (generally every 1-2 months)

THE ART OF SELF LEADERSHIP

YOUR TOUGHEST MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE IS ALWAYS YOURSELF

Bill Hybels

Imagine a compass north, south, east, and west. Almost every time the word leadership is mentioned, in what direction do leaders instinctively think?

South.

Say the word leadership and most leaders' minds migrate to the people who are under their care. At leadership conferences, people generally think, "I'm going to learn how to improve my ability to lead the people God has entrusted to me."

South. It's a leader's first instinct.

But many people don't realize that to lead well, you need to be able to lead in all directions— north, south, east and west.

For example, good leaders have to lead north—those who are over you. You can't just focus on those entrusted to your care. Through relationship and influence good leaders lead the people over them. Much of what I do at Willow Creek, through relationship, prayer, and careful envisioning, is to try to influence those over me—the board and the elders.

Effective leaders also learn how to lead east and west, laterally, in peer group settings. If you don't learn how to lead laterally, if you don't know how to create win-win situations with colleagues, the whole culture can deteriorate.

So a leader must lead down, up, and laterally. But perhaps the most overlooked leadership challenge is the one in the middle. Who is your toughest leadership challenge?

Yourself.

"If your output outweighs your intake then your upkeep will be your downfall."

-Walter Henrichsen

Consider 1 Samuel 30. David, the future king of Israel, is a young emerging leader at the time. He is just learning to lead his troops into battle. He's green. But God is pouring his favor on David, and most of the time the battles go his way. One terrible day though, that pattern changes. After returning home from fighting yet another enemy, David and his men discover soldiers have attacked and destroyed their campsite, dragged off the women and children, and burned all their belongings.

This would define "bad day" for any leader! But it's not over. His soldiers are tired, angry, and worried sick about their families. They're miffed at God. A faction of his men spreads word that they've had it with David's leadership. They figure it's all David's fault, and they decide to stone him to death.

In this crisis David's leadership is severely tested. Suddenly, he has to decide who needs leadership the most. His soldiers? The officers? The faction?

His answer? None of the above.

In this critical moment he realizes a foundational truth: he has to lead himself before he can lead anybody else. Unless he is

squared away internally he has nothing to offer his team. So "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (1 Samuel 30:6). Only then does he lead his team to rescue their families and what's left of their belongings.

David understood the importance of self-leadership. And although self-leadership isn't talked about much, make no mistake, it is a good part of the ballgame. How effectively can any of us lead others if our spirits are sagging, our courage is wavering, and our vision or commitment is weak?

Last summer I read an article that created some disequilibrium for me. The author, Dee Hock, challenged leaders to calculate how much time and energy they invest in each of these directions—people beneath them, over them, peers, and leading themselves. Since he's been thinking and writing about leadership for over 20 years and is a laureate in the Business Hall of Fame, I wanted his wisdom.

His recommendation: "We should invest 50 percent of our leadership amperage into the task of leading ourselves; and the remaining 50 percent should be divided into leading down, leading up, and leading laterally." His numbers bothered me so much I put the article away. But I let it simmer, which is my normal practice when someone messes with my mind.

While that was simmering, I read an article by Daniel Goleman, the author of the best-selling book, *Emotional Intelligence*. Since that book was released in 1997, Goleman has been spending his time analyzing why some leaders develop to their fullest potential and why most hit a plateau far from their full potential.

The best gift you can give the people you lead is a healthy, energized, fully surrendered, focused self. And no one else can do that for you.

His conclusion? The difference is (you guessed it) self-leadership. He calls it "emotional self-control." What characterizes maximized leadership potential, according to Goleman? Tenaciously staying in leadership despite overwhelming opposition or discouragement. Staying in the leadership game and maintaining sober-mindedness during times of crisis. Keeping ego at bay. Staying focused on the mission instead of being distracted by someone else's agenda. All these indicate high levels of emotional self-control. Goleman says, "Exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because of superior self-leadership." As I read his corroborating data, I thought, *Maybe Dee Hock's percentages aren't all that absurd!*

Recall the first five chapters of Mark's Gospel. Remember Jesus' pattern of intense ministry quickly followed by time set aside for reflection, prayer, fasting, and solitude? That pattern is repeated throughout his ministry. Jesus was practicing the art of self-leadership. He would go to a quiet place and recalibrate. He would remind himself who he was and how much the Father loved him. Even Jesus needed to invest regularly in keeping his calling clear, avoiding mission drift, and keeping distraction and temptation at bay.

This is self-leadership. And nobody—I mean nobody—can do this work for you. You have to do this work yourself. Self-leadership is tough work—so tough, Dee Hock says, that most leaders avoid it. Instead, we would rather try to inspire or control our people than to do the rigorous work of reflection.

Some years ago a top Christian leader disqualified himself from ministry. A published article described his demise: "[He] sank like a rock, beat up, burned out, angry and depressed, no good to himself and no good to the people he loved."

When this pastor finally wrote publicly about his experience, he said, "Eventually I couldn't even sleep at night. Another wave of broken lives would come to shore at the church, and I found I didn't have enough compassion for them any more. And inside I became angry, angry, angry. Many people still wonder whatever happened to me. They think I had a crisis of faith. The fact is I simply collapsed on the inside."

He failed the self-leadership test. He should have regrouped, reflected, recalibrated. Maybe taken a sabbatical or received

some Christian counseling. Goleman would say that this guy lost his emotional self-control. Now he's out of the game.

A little closer to home, I'll never forget when three wise people came to me on behalf of the church. They said, "Bill, there were two eras during the first 20 years of Willow Creek history when by your own admission you were not at your leadership best—once in the late seventies and again in the early nineties. The data shows Willow Creek paid dearly for your leadership fumble. It cost Willow more than you'll ever know when you were off—not hitting on all 8 cylinders."

Then they said words I'll never forget: "Bill, the best gift you can give the people you lead here at Willow is a healthy, energized, fully surrendered, focused self. And no one can do that for you. You've got to do that for yourself." And while they were talking, the Holy Spirit was saying, "They're right, Bill. They're right."

Because I know what's at stake, I ask myself several self-leadership questions on a regular basis.

Is my calling sure?

On this matter, I'm from the old school. I really believe that if you bear the name of Jesus Christ, you have a calling, whether you're a pastor or a lay person. We all must surrender ourselves fully to make ourselves completely available to God. Ask, "What's my mission, God? Where do you want me to serve? What would you have me do in this grand kingdom drama?"

Remember what Paul said about his calling? "I no longer consider my life as dear unto myself. Only that I fulfill the mission or the calling given to me by God himself" (*Acts 20:24*).

What happens when you receive a call from the holy God? Your life takes on focus. Energy gets released. You're on a mission.

I have to keep my calling sure. So on a regular basis I ask, *God, is your calling on my life still to be the pastor of Willow Creek and to help churches around the world?* And when I receive reaffirmation of that, then I say, "Then let's go! Let's forget all the other distractions and the temptations. Burn the bridges!"

If you've been called to be a leader, it's your responsibility to keep your calling sure. Post it on your refrigerator. Frame it and put it on your desk. Keep it foremost in your mind.

Is my vision clear?

How can I lead people into the future if my picture of the future is fuzzy? Every year we have a Vision Night at Willow Creek. You know who started Vision Night? I did. Guess who I mainly do it for? Me. Every year when Vision Night rolls around on the calendar it means that I have to have my vision clear.

Every leader needs a Vision Night on the calendar. On that night you say, "Here's the picture; this is what we're doing; here's why we're doing it; if things go right, here's what the picture will look like a year from now."

We prepare very diligently for Vision Night at Willow Creek. We have countless meetings to discuss the future. We spend many hours in prayer: "God, is this what you would have?" We search the Scriptures. By the time Vision Night rolls around, the vision is clear again. But it takes a lot of work to clarify the vision and to keep it clear. Nobody can do that work for you. It's the leader's job.

Is my passion hot?

Jack Welch, the celebrated leader of General Electric, says, "People in leadership have to have so much energy and passion that they energize and impassion people around them."

I couldn't agree more. When I appoint leaders, I don't look for 25-watt light bulbs. I look for 100-watt bulbs because I want them to light up everything and everyone around them.

Whose responsibility is it to keep a leader's passion fired up? The leader's. That's self-leadership.

Last year, at an elders' meeting, a couple of the elders asked me, "As busy as you are, why do you fly out on Friday nights to speak in some small out-of-the-way church to help them raise money or dedicate a new facility? Why do you do that?"

My answer: Because it keeps my passion hot.

Last year I helped a church in California dedicate their new building. One guy took me to the corner of the auditorium, peeled the carpet back, and showed me how everyone in the core of their church had inscribed the names of lost people in the concrete. Then they covered it over with carpet. In that auditorium they're praying fervently that the lost will be found.

It was a four-hour flight back to Chicago. I was buzzed the whole way. That church fired me up! I just love watching men and women throw themselves into the adventure of ministry. It inspires me. I know that my passion has to be white-hot if Willow is going to catch it. I can't become a 25-watt bulb—nor can you.

If you were to be honest for a moment...

What percent of your time is honestly spent leading self? How often do you sit with pen in hand, journal open, heart ready and ask the Spirit of God to speak clearly to your heart? When was the last time you did as David and asked, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." *Psalms 139: 23-24*

We do a lot of conferences through the Willow Creek Association. At times pastors of flourishing churches will pull me aside and say under their breath, "I have to come here once or twice a year just to keep my fires lit." They seem embarrassed about being here so often, as if it's a sign of weakness.

I tell them, "If you're a leader, it's your job to keep your passion hot. Do whatever you have to do, read whatever you have to read, go wherever you have to go. And don't apologize. That's a big part of your job."

Is my character submitted to Christ?

Leadership requires moral authority. Followers have to see enough integrity in the leader's life that high levels of trust can be built. When surveys are taken about what it is that inspires a follower to throw his or her lot in with a particular leader over a long period of time, near the top of every list is integrity.

A leader doesn't have to be the sharpest pencil in the drawer or the one with the most charisma. But teammates will not follow a leader with character incongruities for very long. Every time you compromise character you compromise leadership.

Some time ago we had a staff member who was struggling in his leadership. I started poking around a little bit. "What's going on here?" I asked.

Then the real picture emerged. One person said, "For one thing, he sets meetings and then he doesn't even show. He rarely returns phone calls and often we don't know where he is."

I spoke to that guy and said, "Let's get it straight. When you give your word that you're going to be at a certain place at a certain time and you don't show up, that's a character issue. That erodes trust in followers. You clean that up, or we'll have to move you out." If character issues are compromised, it hurts the whole team and eventually impacts mission achievement.

I don't want to be a leader who demoralizes the troops and hurts the cause either. So on a regular basis, I sing Rory Noland's song in my times alone with God:

Holy Spirit, take control. Take my body, mind, and soul. Put a finger on anything that doesn't please you, anything that grieves you. Holy Spirit, take control.

It's the leader's job to grow in character. No one can do that work except the leader.

Is my pride subdued?

First Peter 5:5 says, "God opposes the proud. He gives grace to the humble." Do you know what Peter is saying? As a leader I have a choice. Do I want opposition from God in my leadership, or do I want grace and favor?

If you're a sailor, you know how hard it is to sail upwind. You also know how wonderful and relaxing it is to sail downwind. Peter is saying, "Which way do you want it? Do you want to sail upwind or downwind? If you're humble, the favor of God carries you. If you're proud, you're sailing into the wind. God opposes the proud."

Do you want to know the best way to find out if pride is affecting your leadership? Ask.

Ask your teammates. Ask the people in your small group. Ask your spouse. Ask your colleagues. Ask your friends, "Do you ever sense a prideful spirit in or around my leadership?" If you just couldn't ask a question like that, then you probably do have a pride issue!

It's a leader's job—with the Holy Spirit's help—to subdue pride.

Are my fears at bay?

Fear is an immobilizing emotion. Sometimes I ask pastors, "Why haven't you introduced more change in your church when you know the church is crying out for it?"

I ask business leaders who are hesitating to launch a new product, "Why haven't you pulled the pin?"

I ask political leaders why they haven't taken a stand on a particular issue, one I know they have strong personal convictions about.

So often the response is: "Because I am afraid." Fear immobilizes and neutralizes leaders.

Believe me, I am not above this. I remember the morning in the year 2000 when it became clear to me that we needed to

launch a \$70 million building program. Our vision for the future was clear. The elders, the board, the management team signed off on it. The last step in the whole equation was for me to have the guts to pull the trigger. And you know what swirled around in my mind? *The minute you go public with a \$70 million campaign, there's no backing out. It's pass-fail.* I realized that everything we had worked for over the past 25 years, all the credibility our congregation has established in our community and around the world was on the line. Fear kept building in my heart. *Why expose Willow to that kind of risk? We're cruising along. We're growing and baptizing a thousand people a year. Why are we doing this?*

I am not above letting fear mess with my decision making as a leader.

At a certain point, I just had to say, "I can no longer let fear sabotage my leadership." I reminded myself of that little verse, 1 John 4:4, "Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world." I asked myself: *Has God spoken to me? Has he made his direction clear? Is the leadership core with us? Is he going to love me if I fail? Am I still going to heaven if this whole thing doesn't turn out right?* I struggled but finally I found the courage to step out in faith. (The campaign was enormously blessed by God. Our church could have missed a great miracle had fear won the day.)

"I have long said, and deeply believe my greatest challenge in ministry, the most difficult person I have to deal with is myself. If I can lead me... discipline myself for the purpose of oneness... if I apply John 3:30 to my life... then God will, and always has, surpassed my every expectation of how I might be useful to Him."

-Todd Wagner

Are interior issues undermining my leadership?

All of us have some wounds, some losses, and some disappointments in our past.

All that stuff has helped shape or misshape us into the people we are today. I laugh at people who say, "My past has not affected me. My family of origin has not affected me."

Leaders who ignore their interior reality often make decisions that have grave consequences for the people they lead. Most of the time, they're unaware of what's driving their unwise decisions. Some pastors make grandiose decisions that enslave everybody in their churches to an agenda that's not God's. It's an agenda that comes out of their need to be bigger than, better than, grander than.

Other leaders are incurable people pleasers. Every week they want to take a poll to see where they stand in the Nielsen ratings.

Who's responsible for your interior issues getting processed and resolved? You are. I am.

I've spent lots of time in a Christian counselor's office. I still am in contact with two Christian counselors. And whenever I think, *Man, there's some stuff coming out of me that has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, and I don't understand it*, I call these counselors. I say, "I don't understand why I said what I said, why I did what I did. I know it's junk. Would you help me?" Effective leaders must get a handle on their "junk!"

Are my ears open to the Spirit's whisper?

I estimate that 75 to 80 percent of the breakthrough ideas in my leadership over the years have come from promptings of the Holy Spirit, not through hard machinations of my mind. Some of the great sermon series or vision adjustments, value clarifications or strategy changes, some of the greatest people selections have not been due to my cleverness. It has been the Holy Spirit whispering to my spirit. Leaders cannot afford to be deaf to heaven. Training, process, and strategy are all good. Developing your mind is essential. But ultimately, we walk by faith, not by sight. There is a supernatural dimension to leadership and it comes our way by keeping an ear open to heaven.

I ask myself regularly, Can I still hear God's voice? Is the ambient noise level of my life low enough that I can still hear God's voice when he speaks? And do I still have the guts to obey him even though I don't understand him all the time?

Is my pace sustainable?

I came close to a total emotional meltdown in the early 1990s. Suffice it to say I didn't understand self-leadership. I didn't understand the principle of sustainability. I fried my emotions. I abused my spiritual gifts. I damaged my body. I neglected my family and friends. And I came within a whisker of becoming a statistic.

I remember sitting in a restaurant and writing: "The pace at which I've been doing the work of God is destroying God's work in me." Then I remember putting my head down on my spiral notebook in that restaurant and sobbing.

But I asked myself, Bill, who has a gun to your head? Who's forcing you to bite off more than you can chew? Who's intimidating you into overcommitting? Whose approval and affirmation and applause other than God's are you searching for that makes you live this way? The answers were worse than sobering. They were devastating.

The elders, to whom I'm accountable, did not cause my pace problem. It wasn't caused by the board or the staff or family or friends. The whole pace issue was a problem of my own making. I had no one else to blame. That's a terribly lonely feeling—having no one else to blame.

So I sat all alone in this cheap restaurant in South Haven, mad as a hornet that I couldn't blame anybody for my kingdom exhaustion and my emotional numbness. To find the bad guy, I had to look in a mirror.

To further complicate matters, the only person who can put a sustainability program together for your future is you. For 15 years, I lived overcommitted and out of control, and deep down I kept saying, *Why aren't the elders rescuing me? Why aren't my friends rescuing me? Don't people see I'm dying here?*

But it isn't their job. It's my job. Please, if you haven't already, commit yourself to developing an approach to leadership that will enable you to endure over the long haul.

Are my gifts developing?

Pop quiz: What are your top three spiritual gifts? If you cannot articulate them as quickly as you can give your name, address, and phone number, I'm tempted to say, "You need your cage rattled!" Before you write me a note telling me I've made you feel bad, I need to let you know that on this issue, I have Sympathy Deficit Disorder. Maybe I need medication or something. But seriously, leaders have to master their spiritual gift profile. They must know which gifts they've been given and how they rank in order.

In addition, the Bible holds every leader accountable before God for developing each of those gifts to the zenith of their spiritual potential.

It's sobering to have to ask myself regularly, *Bill, you know God's only given you three gifts. Some people have five, six, or seven. You've been given three—leadership, evangelism, and teaching.*

Are you growing them? Developing, stretching these gifts? Reading everything you can read? Getting around people who are better than you in these areas? Are you developing the three gifts God has given you?

Because those are the ones I've been given, they're the only ones I'm going to stand accountable for before God someday. I'm learning that I cannot give myself any slack when it comes to spiritual gift development.

Is my heart for God increasing? And is my capacity for loving deepening?

Have you reminded yourself recently whose job it is to grow your heart for God?

Is it the church's job? Your small group's job? No. It's your job to make sure your heart for God is increasing. Nobody can do that for you. You've got to develop the spiritual practices that keep you growing towards Christlikeness.

Likewise, is your capacity for loving people deepening?

If you think about it, you realize God has only one kind of treasure. It's people.

When our kids were young and Lynne and I needed some husband-wife time, we'd get a babysitter. And I'd give those sitters my little talk. As we were heading out, I would say, "You need to know something. We only have two treasures in this life, only two. I don't care if you wreck our car or if the house burns down while we're gone. Really. Just promise me. Promise me you'll take really good care of our children. They are all that really matter to us in this world."

God is saying to leaders, "Promise me. Give me your word. Take care of my treasures. Grow in leadership so that you become the greatest you can be at taking care of my treasures. Love them. Nurture them. Develop them. Challenge them. Mature them. They are all that really matters to me in this world."

And right now would be a good time for you to say to God, "I will."

Bill Hybels is pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois.



READING YOUR GAUGES

By Bill Hybels

For almost all of the eighteen years I have served in ministry, I have monitored myself closely in two areas, continually checking two gauges on the dashboard of my life.

Until recently, I thought that was enough. First, I kept an eye on the spiritual gauge, asking myself, how am I doing spiritually? Apart from Christ I can do nothing. I know that. I don't want my life's efforts to be burned up because they were done merely through human effort, clever tactics, or gimmickry. I am gripped by the fact that I must operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. To keep my spiritual gauge where it needs to be, I have committed myself to the spiritual disciplines: journaling, fasting, solitude, sacrifice, study and others. Like many Christians before me, I have discovered that these disciplines clarify spiritual issues and pump a high-octane fuel, providing intensity and strength for ministry. Even though the pace of ministry has dramatically quickened in the past few years, I honestly don't think I often misread my spiritual gauges. Looking at my life's dashboard, I can tell when I am spiritually half full, three quarters full, or, sometimes, full. When I'm full spiritually, I can look at my life and honestly say I love Jesus Christ and I'm attending to my spiritual disciplines and keeping myself open to the leading of Christ. When I'm spiritually full, I don't need to apologize for my motives. I can truly say: "I'm not in ministry because it gives me strokes. I'm excited about the fruit being borne through the ministry of Willow Creek."

Second, I have monitored the physical gauge-how am I doing physically? I know that if I push my body too hard, over time I will experience a physical breakdown or psychosomatic complications associated with high stress. If I don't exercise, eat properly, and rest, I will offer the Lord only about two-thirds of the energy I have the potential of giving. The Holy Spirit tugs at me to be wholly available-mind, soul, and body-for the work to which he has called me. Consequently, I have committed myself to the physical disciplines of running and weight lifting. I closely watch what I eat. And I receive regular medical check-ups.

THE NEAR CRASH

Since these spiritual and physical gauges – the only two on my dashboard – have consistently signaled "go," I have pushed myself as hard and fast as possible. But recently a different part of my engine began to misfire. While preparing for a particularly difficult series of sermons, the message that week wouldn't come together. No matter how hard I tried, no ideas seemed worth saying.

Suddenly I found myself sobbing with my head on my desk. I've always been more analytic than emotional, so when I stopped crying, I said to myself, "I don't think that was natural." People who know my rational bent laugh when I tell them that. Individuals more aware of their feelings might have known what was wrong, but I didn't. All I knew was, something's not right with me, and I don't even have time now to think about it. I'll have to journal about this tomorrow. I forced my thoughts back to the sermon and managed to put something together for the service.

But the next morning as I wrote in my journal I considered, Am I falling apart in some area spiritually? My gauges said no. My practice of the disciplines seemed regular, and I didn't sense a spiritual malaise. Physically, am I weak or tired? No, I felt fit. I concluded that maybe this was my midlife crisis, a phase I would simply have to endure. But four or five similar incidents in the next few weeks continued signaling that my anxiety and frustration could not be ignored.

Then I noticed I was feeling vulnerable – extremely temptable – in areas where I hadn't felt vulnerable for a long time. And the idea of continuing on in ministry seemed nothing but a tremendous burden. Where had the joy gone? I couldn't bear the thought of twenty more years of this. Maybe God is calling me to a different kind of work, I thought. Maybe he's getting my



attention by these breakdowns in order to lead me to a different ministry. Maybe I should start another church or go back into a career in the marketplace.

At that time, the church was deciding whether to take on a major building expansion, which intensified my feelings. I knew that if we moved ahead, it would be unconscionable for me to leave the senior pastorate until the expansion was complete. Yet when I looked honestly at whether I wanted to sign up for another three or four years, the answer scared me. It was a big fat no. You don't feel like it anymore? I asked myself in disbelief. You want to bail out? What is happening to you? Maybe I did need a change of calling.

Whatever it was, I was astounded that I could be coming apart, because I put so much stock in the spiritual and physical gauges, and neither of them was indicating any problem.

THE OVERLOOKED GAUGE

After a Christmas vacation that didn't change my feelings, I began to seriously inspect my life. After talking with some respected people, I learned that I had overlooked an important gauge. The spiritual and physical aspects of life were important, but I had failed to consider another area essential to healthy ministry – emotional strength. I was so emotionally depleted I couldn't even discern the activity or the call of God on my life. I needed a third gauge on the dashboard of my life.

Throughout a given week of ministry, I slowly began to realize, certain activities drain my emotional reservoir. I now call these experiences IMA's – Intensive Ministry Activities. An IMA may be confrontation, an intense counseling session, an exhausting teaching session, or a board meeting about significant financial decisions. Preparing and delivering a message on a sensitive topic, which requires extensive research and thought, for instance, wears me down. The common denominator of these activities is that they sap you, even in only a few hours.

Every leader constantly takes on IMA's. I didn't realize, however, that I could gauge the degree of their impact on me. As a result, I was oblivious to the intense drain I was experiencing. For example, many times while driving home from church, I would feel thin in my spirit. Sensing something wrong, I would examine my two trusted gauges. In the spiritual area, I'd scrutinize myself: Did you give out the Word of God as best you knew how? Did you pray? Did you fast? Did you prepare? Were you accurate? Did the elders affirm the message? If that gauge read normal, I would proceed to the physical area: Have you kept to your diet? Yes. Have you been working out? Yes. I must be okay. Buck up, Bill. But something was wrong. I needed that third gauge – an emotional monitor – to determine my ministry fitness. Often we attribute our discouragement to spiritual weakness. We berate ourselves; "I'm a bad Christian," or "I'm a lousy disciple." And sometimes our problem does signal that we are not rightly connected to Christ. Yet some problems in ministry stem not from spiritual lapses but from emotional emptiness.

READING THE EMOTIONAL GAUGE

I have now committed myself to installing an emotional gauge in the center of my dashboard and learning how to read it. I take responsibility to manage the emotional reservoir in my life. When my crisis hit, I didn't realize my reservoir was depleted until I (1) I began to feel vulnerable morally, (2) found myself getting short and testy with people, and (3) felt a desire to get out of God's work. Suddenly I knew the tank was nearly dry.

Now my goal is to monitor my emotional resources so I don't reach that point. What signals do I look for? If I drive away from a ministry activity and say, "It would be fine if I never did that again," that's a warning signal. Something is wrong when I look at people as interruptions or see ministry as a chore. Another indicator: On the way home, do I consciously hope Lynne isn't having a problem and my kids don't want anything from me? That's a sign I don't have enough left to give. When I hope that the precious people in my life can exist without me, that's a sign of real trouble. A third check for me is how I approach the spiritual disciplines. I journal and write my prayers. For months I found myself saying, day after day, "I don't



have the energy to do this." I journaled anyway, but more mechanically than authentically. I dislike myself when my Christianity is on autopilot.

Each person has to find the warning signals for his or her own life. But after an intense ministry activity, it helps to ask some questions of yourself: Am I out of gas emotionally? Can I not stand the thought of relating to people right now? Do I feel the urge to take a long walk with no destination in mind? Am I feeling the need to go home, put on music, and let the Lord recharge my emotional batteries?

RECHARGING THE EMOTIONAL RESERVES

My next discovery was humiliating. I found that when my emotional fuel was low, I couldn't do an Indy pit stop and get a fast refill. Replenishing emotional strength takes time – usually more time than it took to drain.

The best analogy I can offer is a car battery. If you sit in a parking lot and run all of your car's accessories – radio, headlights, heater, horn, rear defogger, power windows – you can probably sap that battery in about ten minutes. After that massive drain, suppose you then take the battery to a service station and say, "I'd like this battery charged. I'll be back to pick it up in ten minutes." What would they tell you? "No, we're going to put the battery on our overnight charger. It's going to take seven or eight hours to bring it all the way back up." It has to be recharged slowly or else the battery will be damaged. A slow, consistent charge is the best way to bring a battery back to full power.

Likewise, to properly recuperate from an emotionally draining activity takes time. When I first learned I couldn't get a quick emotional recharge, I shared my frustration about that with another pastor friend. He said, "Bill, you have found a rule you're not an exception to. You can fast and study the Scriptures and lift weights and do whatever you want, but there's no shortcut to rebuilding yourself emotionally. A massive drain requires a slow and steady recharge." That discouraged me. I looked at my average week, and almost every day had an intense ministry activity – preparing a message, delivering a message, meeting with elders, or making some tough decision. I would find little snatches of refreshment during the week, but I finished most weeks with an emotional deficit. Then my family wanted me to have some fun and exciting things planned for them, but I was totally depleted. "I'm going to overload the circuitry," I said to myself.

One day I'm going to find myself in the proverbial fetal position. It has been humbling to take an accurate, honest reading of my emotional gauges. When I see my emotional gauge is reading low, I take time to recharge. Some people recharge by running, other by taking a bath, others by reading, other by listening to music. Usually it means doing something totally unrelated to ministry – golfing, motorcycling, woodcarving. The important thing is to build a ministry schedule that allows adequate time for emotional recharging.

RETURNING TO YOUR GIFT AREAS

I've learned a second thing about maintaining emotional resources for ministry. The use of your major spiritual gift breathes life back into you. When you have identified your spiritual gifts and use them under the direction of Jesus Christ, you make a difference. You feel the affirmation of God and many times you feel more energized after service than before.

I think of when Jesus had that important conversation with the woman at the well. The Twelve came back from buying food and said: "Jesus, you must be famished. We had lunch, and you've just worked through your lunch hour." Jesus responded: "I've had a meal. I had food you're not aware of. I was used by my Father to connect with a woman who was in trouble." Jesus found that doing what the Father had called him to do was utterly fulfilling.

Conversely, serving outside your gift area tends to drain you. If I were asked to sing or assist with accounting, it would be a long hike uphill. I wouldn't feel the affirmation of the Spirit, because I wouldn't be serving as I have been gifted and called to serve. This is why many people bail out of various types of Christian service: they aren't in the right yoke. The principle is self-evident, but unwittingly I had allowed myself to be pulled away from using my strongest gifts.



About the time Willow Creek was founded, I conducted an honest analysis of my spiritual gifts. My top gift was leadership. My second gift was evangelism. Down the list were teaching and administration. I immediately asked two people with well-developed teaching gifts to be primary teachers for the new congregation. God had given me a teaching gift, but it was far enough down the list that I had to work very hard at teaching – harder than a gifted teacher does. Both people declined to teach, however, and we had already set our starting date. I remember thinking, Okay, God, I'll start as primary teacher, but I'm doing it reluctantly. Please bring a teacher and let me lead and evangelize as you have gifted and called me to do.

Recently, when I hit emotional bottom, I decided to do another gift analysis. The results were exactly the same as eighteen years before: leadership and evangelism above teaching and administration. But as I thought about my weekly responsibilities, I realized I was using teaching as though it were my top gift. Seldom was I devoting time to leadership or evangelism.

I have talked with well-respected teachers across the country, and have never had one tell me that it takes him more than five to ten hours to prepare a sermon. They have strong teaching gifts, so it comes naturally and quickly to them. If I, on the other hand, don't devote twenty hours to a message, I'm embarrassed by the result. I was willing to put in those hours, but slowly and surely, the time demand squeezed out opportunities to use my gifts in leadership and evangelism. In order to adequately prepare my messages, I had delegated away almost all leadership responsibilities. And too often in elder or staff meetings, I was mentally preoccupied with my next message. My life became consumed by the use of my teaching gift, which wasn't my most fruitful or fulfilling ministry. Yet people kept saying, "Great message, Bill," and I wrongfully allowed their affirmation to thwart my better judgment.

Since realizing this, we have implemented a team-teaching approach at Willow Creek. It has been well received by the congregation and has allowed me to provide stronger leadership in several areas. It would be difficult for me to describe how much more fulfilled I'm feeling these days.

I have also found new opportunities for evangelism. Recently I met with three guys at an airport. One is a Christian, and the other two are his best friends, who he is trying to lead to Christ. As we talked, I could feel the Holy Spirit at work. After our conversation ended, I ran to my gate, and I almost started crying. I love doing this, I thought. This is such a big part of who I am. I used to lead people to Christ, but I've been preparing so many messages in the past five years that I've forgotten how thrilling it is to share Christ informally with lost people.

If I'm using a third-or fourth-level gift a lot, I shouldn't be surprised if I don't feel emotional energy for ministry. We operate with more energy when we're able to exercise our primary gifts. God knew what he was doing as he distributed gifts for service. As we minister in a way that is consistent with the way God made us, we will find new passion for ministry.

BALANCING THE ETERNAL AND THE EARTHLY

Finally, becoming emotionally depleted re-taught me a lesson I had learned but forgotten. I learned the hard way that a Christian leader has to strike a delicate balance between involvement in the eternal and involvement in the mundane. The daily things of life provide needed counterweight to timeless truths.

When we started the church in 1975, I had discretionary time that I used to race motorcycles, fly a plane, golf and ski. I had relationship outside the congregation and interests other than the church. Since that time, the needs of the church inexorably squeezed out these earthly pursuits. I became consumed with the eternal. I'm an early riser, so from 5:30 in the morning until I crash at 10:30 at night, barely one moment of time is not related to something eternal. I don't exercise at the YMCA anymore; I work out on equipment in my basement. While I'm cycling I read theological journals. When I pump weights, I listen to tapes or think of illustrations for a message. The eternal co-opted the daily routines.

In Jesus' day, people approached life differently. In the Bible, after Jesus ministers or delivers an important discourse, usually



you'll find a phrase like this: "Then Jesus and the disciples went from Judea into Galilee." Those small phrases are highly significant. Such journeys were usually many miles long, and most of the time Jesus and his disciples walked. You don't take a multi-mile walk over a lunch break. What happens on a long walk? Guys tell a few jokes, stop and rest awhile, pick some fruit and drink some water, take a siesta in the afternoon, and then keep going. All this time, emotional reserves are being replenished, and the delicate balance between the eternal and the mundane is being restored. It's a different world today, and I wasn't properly aware of the changes. Put car phones and fax machines and jet airplanes into the system, and suddenly the naturally forced times for the mundane disappear.

Recently I made a commitment to speak in northern Michigan. Later the person who invited me called back and asked, "Can you give two talks while you're here?" I agreed. He called back several weeks later and said, "Bill, we need you to give three talks while you're here, and if you could meet with some of our people for breakfast, that would be great, too." "How am I going to get there in time?" I asked. "We'll send a plane for you." Not too long after that call, another person called me from Texas. "Bill," he said, "I'm in deep weeds. I've got a thousand college kids coming, and the speaker we had lined up bailed out. Most of these kids have read your book *Too Busy Not to Pray*, and we built the whole thing around your book. Could you help us out?" "When is it?" I asked. He told me, and I said, "I don't think that's going to work, because I'm going to be in northern Michigan that morning." He asked, "How are you getting there?" "This guy's sending a plane," I said. He said, "Well, could you call the guy and see if the plane could bring you down here?" The result was that I got on a plane at 7:00 on a Friday morning and flew to northern Michigan, met with the leaders, gave three talks, and had a meeting over lunch. Then I got on a plane and flew all the way to southern Texas, with a person pumping me for information most of the time. I met with another set of leaders over dinner, gave two talks, got back on the plane, and arrived home at 1 am Saturday morning. Then I preached Saturday evening and twice on Sunday morning.

The point is that spiritually, I was fine – I had maintained my disciplines and was striving to obey Christ. Physically, I held up fine – it wasn't like running a marathon. But I was totally depleted emotionally. I was filling my life chock full of eternal opportunities.

What's wrong with that? Besides the emotional drain, I realized two other hidden costs of such a ministry-centered lifestyle. First, if you are concerned only with spiritual activities, you tend to lose sight of the hopelessness of people apart from Christ. You're never in their world. Second, you lose your wonder of the church, of salvation, and of being part of the work of God. You can overload on eternal tasks to the point that you no longer appreciate their glories.

I should have known this, because what has saved my ministry are my summer study breaks. During those weeks away, in between studying, I jog or sail, often with nonbelievers. That's when I feel a renewed compassion for them, for I see afresh the hopelessness and self-destructiveness of life outside of Christ. During these breaks I also start missing worship at our church, and I begin craving relationships with staff and elders. Having enough of the wonder and delights of the Christian life.

I cannot continue to work seventy and eighty hour weeks for many reasons, not the least of which is that they don't allow enough time to be away from the church so that I love it when I come to it. Knowing this, I have renewed my commitment to integrate into my life more activities that are not church related. I'm golfing more. I recently enrolled in a formula racing school and learned to drive race cars. This past summer I learned how to barefoot ski. I want to fly airplanes. If I don't schedule these things – if I wait till my calendar opens up – they don't happen.

In Christian ministry the needs of people are endless. At a certain point I have to tell myself, Bill, you had better wake up to the fact that you're not going to get all your work done. It will be there tomorrow. I'm determining to live a healthy life so that I can offer more than a few short years of frenzied activity. My goal is to monitor my spiritual, physical, and emotional resources so that I can minister, by God's grace, for a lifetime.

I often think of Billy Graham, who has been a high integrity leader for the cause of Jesus Christ for forty-five years. He's



humble, pure-hearted, and self-effacing, and every day he draws on the sufficiency of Christ. It was a penetrating thought for me to think, what if God wants to elongate my ministry? If God doesn't change his call in my life, can I continue to live at my current pace for another twenty years? I knew I couldn't. I'm convinced God wants us to live so as to finish the race we've started. That's the challenge of every Christian leader. And monitoring all three gauges – spiritual, physical, and emotional – plays an important part in our longevity.

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