

# THE PROCESS OF A LEADER

BY JORDAN BIEL

## SAMPLE

### YOUR PROMISE ISN'T FOR YOU

Keep in mind that, sometimes, you won't even see the full extent of the promise God's given you. Why? It's not so much for you. It's for others. Abraham was given the promise of a new land where his children and family would become so blessed and so extensive that they'd be hard to number! He didn't get to see the full extent of this promise fulfilled! Moses didn't enter the Promised Land. He had trouble with the character tests. He had trouble enduring and trusting God. He was used by God in incredible ways—don't get me wrong. But he did not enter the Promised Land. What if he had discovered that mentoring Joshua and seeing them all enter the Promised Land together was his highest privilege? As you go through the process of a leader, you realize that your leadership has very little to do with you. It has everything to do with them. God has a message of liberty for those you lead. You're just the messenger.

Seeing the promise that God gave you in prayer come to life is one of the most meaningful and life-giving things you can ever experience. But where does it begin? In faith! It begins with facing the realities around you and letting God speak to you in prayer, giving you a promise. We talked about the first two realities, now let's discuss the third.

### THE THIRD REALITY—MY PROMISE IS UNIQUE

You've got to take an honest assessment of the talents God's given you, begin to thank God for them, and use them to build His kingdom. Understand that your promise and purpose in life are uniquely tailored for you. The gifts God has given you are uniquely tailored for you to accomplish your promise! Many leaders fall short of their purpose because they begin to compare themselves to others. This is a classic trap of the enemy. Take ten minutes and read Luke 19:11–27. After you read, face the reality that is yours alone and answer these questions:

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- » What problems are around you?

- » What is the conflict in your heart? What is it that makes you say, “That isn’t right!”?
- » What assignments has God already given you?
- » What do you have in your hand?

You have something King Jesus can use! David had five rocks and a sling. Moses had a staff. Gideon had a horn. Samson had a donkey bone. Daniel had the gift of interpretation and wisdom. Esther had beauty and wit. Elisha had a mentor (and his coat). Peter had a big mouth. Paul had an amazing intellect and a gift for communication. Silas had the gift of prophecy. Martha had the gift of hospitality. Lydia had an entrepreneurial gift.

In the parable you just read from Luke 19, notice a few things about the servants and Jesus’ response. Jesus rebukes them for comparing themselves to one another. He notes that the good steward is thankful to work, believes the master is kind, and gets rewarded in the end. The bad steward, however, resists submission and is ungrateful. He believes the master (God) is harsh. His mind is dominated by fear and, in the end, he loses what was to be his. What a stark contrast Jesus creates in this parable. Every leader should take note. We must be grateful for our obstacles, our opportunity to work. We must believe that God *is* good and that He knows what He’s doing. We must believe that, if God put us in charge, then He believes we have what it takes. We must be motivated by love and not fear. The wicked servant said, “I was afraid, so I hid . . . .” Too many leaders are afraid—afraid of the outcome, afraid of what people will think, afraid of really letting God investigate their heart, afraid to face reality. After a leader faces the reality of their own fears and weak areas, they can more clearly see the obstacles standing in front of the promise being fulfilled.

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## **OBSTACLES**

Obstacles appear when we begin our leadership journey. What is leadership without leading people or teams over an obstacle? We’ve all been there, haven’t we? Things are going great and then BAM! This happened to Moses. This happened to David. Out of

nowhere, the contract is broken by the client or business partner. Our IP is stolen right out from under us. Our closest friend on the team goes AWOL—or worse, spreads dissension in the team, undermining our integrity or aptitude to lead. We’ll look at some of those stories in this book. These obstacles are difficult. The new ministry program did *not* go as planned. The worship leader played in the key of B while the team played in B-flat for a solid minute because he put his capo on four instead of three (yup, I’ve seen it). The one person you delegated the most responsibilities to for the event simply didn’t show up or call to cancel. The ministry or company website went down (and none of the data was copied and saved elsewhere).

Everyone hates an obstacle. Everyone. This may sound harsh, but hear me out—for simplicity and for the sake of understanding this stage, an “obstacle” can be a dilemma. I want to differentiate “reality” from “obstacle” briefly. Usually, a reality is something within, while an obstacle is something on the outside.

The truth is that an obstacle can only have two results—it can stop you or it can make you stronger. Period. If I’m on a path and suddenly have a 20-foot-long, 2-mile-wide wall in front of me blocking my path, I can stop in my tracks and quit. Or I can figure out a way to get over that obstacle. In doing so, I’m only going to become smarter or stronger or both. If I get a rope and climb over, I’ve built my arm muscles and have become stronger. If I get a plane and fly over, I’ve learned to fly. If I find a pilot to fly me over, I have a new friend. If I inspire a team to get over it together, I’ve made new friends and memories . . .

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and probably had a few good laughs, too! If I quit, I fail. The adventure ends, and there’s certainly no reward.

Every one of us on our quest for leadership will face obstacles. The sad thing is that there are leaders who quit at the smallest ones. Their journey ends just as it’s beginning. They quit because they didn’t respond correctly to the very thing God had given them to make them stronger or smarter.

A leader doesn’t see an impossible obstacle when they see that wall. They see an opportunity. They see something to conquer. If you are naturally pessimistic, I encourage you to put on a different perspective: the perspective of faith. When you face a problem at work, address the problem and, yes, face reality; but then work hard at creatively finding a solution. In fact, any time you submit a problem to your boss,

submit a suggested solution. Leaders turn obstacles into opportunities. That's not just "leader talk," either; that's what faith in God does.

Religion focuses on what we can't do. Faith focuses on what God can do and has done.

But what do we do when that 20-foot wall is a person—when a person is the obstacle? Keep this in mind: a person is never the obstacle. Often, the disciples would say, "Jesus, make these people go home." In other words, "They're in the way." If people are in the way of your dream, then you've got the wrong dream. You've mistaken the pride in your heart for a promise from God. People will give you problems, there's no doubt about it. Even your own team may create obstacles for you. But *they* are never the enemy.

Jesus said, "If they hate Me, they'll hate you." If they lied about Jesus, they'll lie about you. If they were combative towards Jesus, they'll be combative towards you. Jesus knew that this was simply the sin within these individuals. If Jesus was able to forgive them and focus on their potential, then you can too! If Jesus was able to lead them despite the obstacles they provided Him, then He can help you lead them, too! Teammates will falter. Friends will walk away. Those you lead and serve may turn and bite you. Hurt people hurt people. Loved people love people. Know that those who seem to be creating obstacles for you may just need to know how deeply they are loved by Father God and even by you. Be reminded of how loved you are, and from that place of security, love and forgive people and keep leading them.

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## **CHARACTER TESTS**

Before Michael Hyatt was the CEO of Thomas Nelson and a best-selling author, he was a new staff member promised \$27,000 with the understanding that he would get a raise of \$3,000 after ninety days if he did well. He hustled and killed it. When the time came for the raise, the company instituted a wage freeze. His boss had such integrity that he paid Michael the \$3,000 out of his own pocket. WOW! Now that's character.

Character is underpromising and overdelivering. Too many leaders make big promises and then underdeliver. That breaks trust, the bedrock of every relationship. Instead, when you are given an opportunity to commit, give it your all and overdeliver on what you've committed to do. Character is showing up on time or early, doing the right thing just because it's the right thing, and choosing to go the extra mile to do your part—even if others are being lazy. Character gives 110 percent and makes no excuses.

Character means you say what you mean and mean what you say without being mean. You follow through and you can be counted on.

Character is a defining characteristic of every great leader. Without it, you simply will not last. People will only follow a leader they know they can trust— someone who is reliable and truly has their best interests in mind. When your team sees you pass a character test, it inspires them to keep following you. If you flunk a character test, admit it. Your team will forgive your mistake. They won't forgive your unwillingness to admit a mistake. Don't try to disguise your character flaw or mistake with charisma. Admit it when you could've done something better or when you missed the mark. Your team will value that honesty and that moment will, ironically, build more trust among the team.

Overcoming obstacles can soon become addictive. It can put a smile on your face—a good smile. You know the kind: when you've reached a goal or solved a problem in your church or company. The next week presents a new obstacle and God gives you wisdom to solve that, too! It's a joy to go to God in prayer, ask Him for wisdom, and then leave the prayer closet and get to work together!

The problem with overcoming an obstacle—or even many in a row—is that you're tempted to believe that you're invincible—that nothing can harm you. You can do no wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. When you reach a place of success, when you overcome a big obstacle—be it through your own diligent efforts, team unity, even a stroke of luck, or simply the hand of God giving you a miracle—then you're tempted to think that *you deserve more* than you do. And this is where the next step in the process begins: your character is tested.

When you begin to think this way, the cure is gratitude. Gratitude says, "Everything I've been given is enough." It says, "I don't want more. I need less." Gratitude says, "Because I'm so thankful that God helped me reach this goal or overcome that obstacle, I'm going to remain humble and teachable. If He helped me with this, He can be counted on for wisdom again." God remains the noun, the one at the center, the actor with the lead role. Your character will also be tested the minute you overcome an obstacle or defeat a common enemy.

Character is missing when you believe you deserve more than you do—that your success is only the result of what you've done. **Satan wants you to believe that you succeed all on your own—that your success is man-made. You must recognize what a Christian leader recognizes: "Others paid the price for me to enjoy this moment of success." You did not arrive where you are on your own.** Trust me. Someone taught you how to work hard, how not to steal or take someone else's credit,

how to persevere. Someone likely created the environment in which you serve. Someone paved the way. Someone demonstrated for you what it means to lead well. Are you a pastor at a church? Someone planted it. Are you the new vice president of your firm? Someone started that firm. Are you the starting guard? Your coach saw your potential, gave you the disciplines to be fit enough to last the length of the game, taught you the plays, and put you in the game. Gratitude is a clear sign of a great leader who will increase his or her impact. It's a sign of character which leads to endurance.

**You are where you are as a result of your effort *and* the efforts of others and the grace of God! Never forget that.**

When God gives you favor, be careful. With favor comes attention, and with attention comes temptation. Proverbs 16:18 (NIV) says it like this: "Pride goes before destruction; a haughty spirit before a fall." We've all seen it. Another leader becomes another statistic. Don't let that be your story! Guard your heart and remain humble and broken before God, ready for Him to correct you when you need it, knowing that He corrects His children whom He loves.

Jeremiah 50:32 (NIV) says, "The arrogant one will stumble and fall." Pride blinds you to your own needs, which are obvious to everyone around you. When you're proud, you're the only one who doesn't see it. Pretty soon, people simply don't want to be around you anymore. If this is the case, you've lost your influence and therefore your leadership. Find a place to get on your knees, humble yourself before the Lord, and allow His grace to give you a fresh start.

The Christian leader in danger of failing the character tests is the one who feels he will never fall. That's why 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, "Take warning unless you fall." Satan knows when to time his attack. He often gives his greatest blow just after a great victory. Every leader we read about in the Bible faced this.

Soon after Elijah defeated 850 false prophets, Jezebel had him running for his life and feeling suicidal. King David was experiencing victory after victory. In fact, he hadn't yet known defeat. Satan placed Bathsheba in front of him during this season of success. After the greatest revival to occur in the city, Jonah's character was tested with the lie of victimhood and self-pity. And after being promoted by Potiphar and overcoming obstacles, Joseph faced his first major test of character.

James 4:6 says "The Lord gives grace to the humble and resists the proud." In commenting on this scripture, K. A. Richardson says the following.

*Quoting Proverbs 3:34, James recalled for his audience that God is determined to resist the proud. Those who wrap up their selfishness and self-sufficiency in arrogance*

*will receive the full measure of divine rejection. Such is the universal announcement throughout Scripture and the extra-biblical writings. Pride is frequently listed among the human vices and is closely associated with the sin of envy. Earlier in James's letter the story of the proud rich and the envious church leaders and their followers (2:2-4) show both God's opposition to the self-promoting rich and their self-serving welcomers as well as God's preference for the humble poor. Pride stirs up the desires of all those who have succumbed to various temptations of the heart. Pride leads to boasting. The sin of haughtiness not only tends to boast in what it has and in its own life but even boasts in what it does not have and takes credit for someone else's accomplishments. Arrogance totally obscures the faith that trusts in things unseen, hidden in God.*

*On the other hand, God shows favor to those who humble themselves. All of James's hearers were invited to join the ranks of the humble who trust in God. The term here for the 'humble' is rooted in the condition of lowliness and poverty. Biblically, God is particularly interested in reversing the hierarchies of status in the world. This is why God has chosen "those who are poor . . . to be rich in faith" (2:5). The close connection between the condition of lowliness and the virtue of poverty is reflected in the story of Saul wishing to make David his son-in-law in 1 Samuel 18:23. David's simple response was, "I'm only a poor man and little known." But precisely this attitude, which he maintained in spite of gross sin throughout his life, made David a man after God's own heart, that is, favored, graced. David exemplifies what the proverb is intended to teach: God is always ready to accept those who accept him and to give them more grace. Should we sin that grace might increase? No! But grace does more than meet the challenge of our sinful desires.<sup>1</sup>*

Every great leader, whether Joseph or David or Gideon, knew that he was but a broken human in light of a holy Creator God. Moments of weakness, in view of poor choices, always bring this reality to the surface. Great leaders are willing to recognize it for what it is and admit their sin and need for grace. Those who don't admit fault simply won't last. Humility in a leader not only follows the example of Christ but also attracts others, as it connects with them on a basic, human level. When leaders act as if they've never failed, they distance themselves from the team they lead and, because of that distance, can't truly know the team or their followers. And when you don't know those you lead, you can't lead them well.

In Donald T. Phillips's classic book *Lincoln on Leadership*, he writes:

*By today's standards, the moniker "Honest Abe" might be considered pretentious or even contrived. But the fact is that leaders who tell their subordinates the truth, even when the news is bad, gain greater respect and support for ideas than their less*

*virtuous counterparts. Even though he had some detractors, Lincoln attained success, admiration, and a positive image by maintaining his integrity and honesty. Those*

1 K. A. Richardson, *The New American Commentary: James*, vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 181–182.

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*who questioned his upbringing and education, or even his political affiliations, tended not to doubt his integrity. Lincoln showed the same degree of fairness and decency whether disciplining or congratulating a subordinate. Emulating his style will earn leaders the trust and respect that ultimately fosters passionate commitment. This approach shows that the truth is a common denominator for all interactions, among any group, and with people of varying personalities.<sup>2</sup>*

In my first book, *Truth & Love*, I stress the importance of being honest with others to form godly, lasting relationships. I'm so tired of seeing Christians, especially lay leaders, leave churches because they didn't know how to handle conflict biblically. As a leader, this is true on a much greater scale. If you can't be honest with your staff as to where they're not meeting expectations and yet speak in love, you're not yet leading like Jesus. Jesus was unafraid to correct His disciples. He was more concerned with His success in terms of obeying the Father in training up disciples than He was with simply being liked at all times. The same is true for you. Be honest. Be sincere. Teach your team the importance of being real and being humble. You will teach them best by displaying humility. When you've blown it, admit it. When you could've done better, admit it. Be eager to "own it" and show a desire to improve. They will follow your lead and you will all be better for it.

Be transparent. Admit mistakes. Apologize quickly. Compliment others. Don't take all the credit. Take responsibility. Real leaders do this and know that humility is required to pass character tests. If your perspective is blinded by pride, you won't even see the character tests for what they are; you'll succumb to temptation, thinking that you deserve whatever Satan is offering you. You'll think you deserve more than you do.

**- - Sonship is knowing that all the Father has given is more than enough - -**

When you feel that you deserve more than you have, you've lost sight of the commandment, "Do not covet" (Exodus 20:17, HCSB). Coveting is wanting what isn't yours—what God hasn't given you. **Forgetting the goodness of God will cause you to covet. Coveting will lead to sin—a failure of the character tests.** As leaders, we are always pushing ahead and asking for more, but we need to be very careful to guard our hearts against asking God to give us something just because another leader has it.



Coveting or wanting a platform the Lord hasn't given you or hasn't given you yet is a slippery slope. Instead, let gratitude fill your heart for what you've been given.

Being thankful for what God has given you will keep you out of trouble. Hear me, leader! Being thankful for what God has already given you—the job you have, the spouse you have, the home you have—will keep you out of trouble. Thankfulness is like having a tour guide through the precarious land mines of character tests you're bound to face.

How many more headlines do you need to read to believe me? When a leader rises to the top, then has an affair, being duped by Satan into believing that he or she deserves more than they have, we all feel a little pain. The entire body of Christ feels that pain. We feel for the woman who was committed to him in marriage. We feel for the kids who have to suffer now, watching their parents fight and possibly separate. So much pain comes from a leader's moral failure. That failure began when the leader assumed that he deserved more. Wanting to make a bigger impact for Jesus is one thing; feeling that you deserve more is another.

Success is that feeling we get when we've overcome obstacles. Success is no more deadly than when it's in the public eye. When a man or woman is complimented over and over, it can soon "go to their heart," not just their head. When that happens, soon what was once off-limits is now okay. What was once "No!" is now "Maybe it wouldn't hurt."

Leader, don't forget who made you. Don't forget who called you out of darkness and into His glorious light! Don't forget that Jesus paid a terribly high price to redeem you and to restore you to friendship with God!

**Don't forget who you really are—a child of God, a prodigal come home, a cherished son of a loving Father. If you forget that, you'll strive to make your name great and, in that aim, compromise and fail the character tests. On the flip side, if you remember who and whose you are, you'll make it!**

Remember that Creator God created you and thereby has the final say on your intrinsic value, and you won't strive for another accolade or feel the need to be seen as something you're not. Find joy in simply knowing Jesus and being close to Him. If you'll discipline yourself to fuel that relationship by meeting with Jesus each and every day, opening His Word and "hiding His Word in your heart," you'll be able to "keep yourself pure" as the psalmist said—and you'll be glad you did!

Why does God even allow for these attacks or tests of our character? I think we need to be reminded of two things. First, God's Spirit is able to use anything to continue to

purify us as the bride of Christ Jesus. One of the Spirit's primary roles is to find and prepare a bride for Jesus. Jesus used this metaphor of a wedding often. Apart from initially drawing men to Christ, the Spirit's next role is to continue to purify each person for the coming wedding supper of the Lamb. In the words of Paul, we are saved and being saved. So there's the purification aspect we can't forget. Second, we realize that, when our character is tested, we are strengthened as Christian leaders. We don't like the test, we don't enjoy it; but we are certainly stronger because of it. In the same way, an athlete doesn't so much enjoy the pains that plague his stomach as he runs eight miles during training. Yet every time he pushes past the pain, he's a stronger runner afterward. Your test makes you stronger.

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## **ENDURANCE**

We *all* get tired sometimes. Every leader, even you, will face fatigue. You may be fatigued right now and not even know it. If you're lashing out at coworkers or staff, you may be fatigued. If you're blaming your short-tempered outbursts on someone's inability to perform, you're fatigued. If you find yourself demanding unrealistic performance from those you lead, you're likely fatigued and near burnout. You need rest. You need to find strength in spending time with Jesus.

You may know the story of the prophet Elijah feeling suicidal. He was hiding from Jezebel, who was chasing him with death threats. Now, you'd think that, after seeing God display His power with fire falling from heaven, Elijah would be celebrating on a mountaintop, right? No fear in sight, right? Nope. Although he was coming off a spiritual high, he was physically drained and needed a break. God brought him ravens with meat to nourish him. God forced him to nap. He didn't need another conference. He needed a nap and a meal. When's the last time you took a siesta? Do you realize that, sometimes, you just need a nap? As a leader, you're probably like me: driven and task-oriented. But with that drive, passion, and possibly a "go-go-go" personality, you must learn the discipline of rest. Your soul needs it. For your marriage, your relationship with your kids, and your ministry to be healthy, you need rest. For you to endure the process that God has for you, you need to rest.

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In Elijah's encounter with God, notice this detail: ravens are meat-eaters. My friend in ministry, Andre Van Zyll, points out, "God will provide meat-eaters to not eat the meat

so that you can get what you need. He loves you that much!” Sometimes, the most spiritual and efficient thing you can do is rest.

God designed rest into the order of the universe. He called it *Sabbath*. The fields yield greater crops when they rest every seven years. We yield greater energy and “performance” when we rest on the Sabbath and truly give the entire day to doing nothing except acknowledging that God is truly Creator and worthy of our worship and admiration. We get our emotional tanks refueled when we rest and take some “me time,” as it’s often called now. Me time isn’t selfish. Taking time to close your eyes and enjoy the weather, a sunset, or a walk with your spouse is not only wise—it’s honoring to God and it’s obeying the order of life that He established. To endure the process of a leader, you must learn how to rest, for in rest, we are acknowledging the end of ourselves and the work of God despite the end of our energy.

## FOUR WAYS TO PREVENT FATIGUE AND BURNOUT

### 1) Friends outside your ministry/company

Friendships that are authentic, honest, and fun are absolutely necessary for you to avoid burnout. A big part of refueling is being with friends who don’t drain energy from you but add energy to you. You can feel it. I can feel it. We all know that feeling when we are drained after being with someone, be it a client or church member or anyone who simply needs you to help solve an issue. Yes, that’s meaningful, but it’s also draining. You need friends who leave you feeling reenergized after hanging out with them. There must be time when you’re accomplishing nothing. Even if you have to reframe the hangout time, tell yourself that you’re accomplishing the goal of being refueled by accomplishing nothing. Reframe the idea of downtime. You’re not being lazy. You’re refueling.

### 2) Hobbies

I had two mentors tell me the same thing when I became a lead pastor. “Jordan,” they said, “Whatever you do as you enter this new season of becoming a senior pastor, do not quit making music altogether. You have to carve out time for that. Otherwise you’ll suffocate.” That was some of the best advice ever given to me.

I was writing and producing music three days a week for eight years before becoming lead pastor. Let’s just say that “I LOVE MUSIC.” There’s nothing like it. To lock into a pocket and create a melody that rings in the ears of people, causing them to praise and be thankful, is simply amazing. I still make music every Friday, and I guard that time like a bulldog guarding a new bone. Why? I get to continue to be fully me. If you don’t

create some time for yourself to just enjoy something, you'll lose some of the joy in your life. It's a great idea to have a hobby outside of your church or business. Take time for something enjoyable that will give *you* fuel. If you "burn the candle at both ends," you'll burn out. That doesn't make you look spiritual, and burnout certainly isn't God's plan for you. It is not part of the process He has in mind and it's not what your spouse or children desire, either.

### 3) Daily Time with Jesus

Your daily devotional life must remain of highest importance. Without it, you'll begin to strive in your own strength and gradually depend on God less and less. This will leave you feeling worn out and burned out. Jesus died not to make you a successful leader. He died so you could be His friend and brother and know the Father on a personal level. This relationship of love must be preeminent. Nurture it. Guard it. Take care of your time with the Lord, and don't let any goal interfere with it. Don't let any demand from any person steal it. Don't let social media or the need to scroll keep you from knowing the One who holds the stars. Don't give up the inheritance for a bowl of soup. Value what Jesus paid for. Spend time daily with Him, and you'll find that you've got more than enough energy for the day and confidence to face what comes your way.

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In the old covenant, there was a light in the tabernacle. When you look at the menorah and the function it served—to give light to the tent of meeting—you may notice that it had to be continually filled with oil from above for that wick to avoid burning out. Likewise, you are called to shine the light of Jesus Christ as a leader in your community; but unless you take time to let God fill you with the oil of His Spirit, you'll soon burn out. The wick needs the oil. Likewise, you need the oil of the Spirit, and that only comes through waiting and resting in God's presence.

Years after Moses and the tabernacle, we find David discovering the beauty of knowing God one-on-one. Let's follow David's example and discover the joy of knowing God intimately each and every day by spending time in His presence. No leader plans to quit or throw in the towel one day. We all want to succeed and put a smile on God's face. We want to endure. A key to endurance in your public ministry is your worship in privacy. Follow the apostles' example and take time to wait on the Lord to fill you and refill you on a regular basis. The leader who doesn't take time to pray and be filled is the leader who leads in his own strength, and man's strength will always come to an end. But in the Spirit, there is newness of life and an ease that enables you to keep going and keep going strong.

“It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord. —Zechariah 4:6

#### 4) Exercise

Do you want to endure? Take care of your body. The simple act of leading yourself, disciplining yourself into a routine of exercise, trains your brain to feel the following: *I'm in control of my life. My life is not out of control or out of focus. Other people and their demands are not dictating my every move. The Holy Spirit has given me the fruit of self-control, and He can help me with my health.*

It's so rejuvenating to work out and put your body in its proper place of health. Like most people, I'm not 100 percent diligent in this, yet I know that when I am, I feel much, much better. I've got more energy to lead and lead well. Thousands of studies have proven the various benefits of exercise. It increases your ability to think clearly, reach goals at work and, for most people, it leaves them feeling energized and ready for what lies ahead. Many of the greatest leaders of our day are also athletes or, at the very least, disciplined to exercise weekly. That's not a coincidence.

When your body, soul, and spirit are being taken care of, you're much more likely to endure the difficulties of leadership. You're more likely to manage criticism properly; and if you're a leader, criticism will come. It's an occupational hazard. If you aren't healthy and at peace—body, soul, and spirit—criticism will cause anxiety and lead to all kinds of trouble.

As a leader, not everyone will like what you say or the decisions you make. Know that up front. You're a leader. You lead. It's what you do. The very act of leading implies that you will be making changes. Maybe you've heard the old saying, “The only place that consistently rejects change is the cemetery.” The people you lead are alive. . . . I'm assuming, anyway.

The majority of time, those who offer critique are not being negative or rebellious toward you. Don't take it personally. They are simply wanting what's best. Be the leader who takes their criticism and questions and genuinely listens to their concerns with an open mind and heart. Endure criticism. Even welcome it. I've told my team often, “Tell me if I'm wrong or need to change in any way,” or, “Guys, let me know if you think that could've been better.” I also ask, “Is there any habit I have that is frustrating you that you'd like to tell me about?”

When given the permission, they'll sometimes share something that's a blind spot to me. I have even opened my sermon or lecture to my leadership team and asked some of

my staff, “Please look this over and tell me what I’m missing or how it could be better.”

**Great leaders don’t only endure criticism—they welcome it, because they want to be continually growing.** After God gives you a promise or a dream, reality must be faced. In facing reality, there will be many obstacles to overcome and even tests of your character. If you endure these by humbling yourself and constantly looking to Jesus in prayer and to your team for feedback, you’ll likely experience what the world would call success: a place in which you’ve either achieved your goals or have a following of some sort. For many, the stage of success can prove to be the most difficult.

Promise | Reality | Obstacles | Character Tests | Endurance | **SUCCESS** | Sonship

## **SUCCESS**

This is one of the hardest stages for any leader. Ironically, it’s also the easiest. That’s what makes it so hard. When you have success in the eyes of people, things start to get easier for you. People start to treat you with honor and respect, and the Bible teaches us to honor and respect those whom God has placed in authority, so that’s fully expected. You may even get more perks now that you’re “in charge.” You may be commended so much that it goes not only to your head but also to your heart.

**A crowd does not equal compromise. A crowd also doesn’t equal true success in the eyes of God.**

**Every leader is called to steward something unique.**

**True success is faithful obedience to what God asked *you* to do.**

Keep in mind that not every leader who is successful is in error. It’s very foolish and dangerous to assume that. There are many leaders who have a large following and are simply doing a great job with total integrity. Why do I share this? I share this because, for some reason, I’m seeing a trend in the last few years. Many pastors who have megachurches are attacked more and more. Often, their accusers are assuming something untrue. It’s almost as if they assume that, if you have a large crowd, you must be compromising or be a false teacher. But if you go by that standard, Jesus would have been a compromising false teacher, and we know that’s not true. So what is success? In the kingdom of God, it’s obedience. It’s faith. We know what it looks like in the world’s eyes. We know that, to many people, success means moving up the

ladder at work. It means reaching goals that you set out to reach. It means achievements, accolades, and being at the top.

Earlier, you read Luke 19. Go back and ask yourself, *What stopped the servants from creating a return on investment for the Master?* Fear. **Fear will always stop you from obedience, and obedience to the Lord is success in this life.**

**Success doesn't come after obedience to the Lord.** We often think that success or failure is what is determined after we try. That isn't the case with God. Success or failure doesn't come after you try. The "trying" *is* the succeeding. The faith to say "yes" *is* the succeeding. Your success as a leader in the kingdom of God is determined by one thing and one thing only—humble obedience.

If you will simply obey God out of a true heart of thankfulness and love and let *Him* worry about the outcome, you'll begin to see miracles all around you as God moves in powerful ways! You'll see financial miracles for you and those around you! You'll begin to see your church, company, or nonprofit move forward with more progress than ever before. We as Christian leaders need to learn that big risks are all *small* risks when we serve such a big God!

The better you grasp your identity as a loved child of God, the bigger risks you'll take. To God, failure is never fatal.

The Gospels tell us that there was a man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit. It would throw his son into the fire, and he was constantly in danger. Can you imagine that fear as a parent? Can you imagine the worry you'd feel all day, every day? The man approached Jesus, probably thinking, *This is my last resort! Nothing else has worked so far!* "Nothing is impossible for him who believes!" Jesus said in Mark 9:23. Nothing is impossible!

If you say, "Well, our company morale is so messed up right now that it would take a miracle for it to change for the better," I have good news! Jesus still performs miracles! Begin to pray and ask God, "Lord, do a miracle at my work and turn the hearts of those who are angry and bitter into hearts of clay—humble and broken. I ask You, God, to do the impossible and turn our company around for Your glory! May every staff member and employee suddenly find the joy of working together to serve our customers! May each employee begin to thank God for their job and serve in their role with passion! In Jesus' name, Amen!"

If you're a pastor who's thinking, *I can't make any progress in this church. I've been praying for months, and nothing has changed,* pray again! Pray that God pours out His Spirit and revives hearts that are far from Him. Pray that God opens their eyes to see

what's possible! God may not answer prayers like that until you pray and ask! God may not turn your church around until you simply ask Him to and believe that He will! God can do what seems impossible! And He can do it fast!

Ask the addict who was set free from the addiction through Jesus Christ in a Teen Challenge center. I've heard hundreds of men share about God's miracle-working power that set them free from cocaine, heroin, and alcohol addictions. I've seen them cry tears of joy describing how God took their desire for their drug away completely in an instant. God can do it! If God can deliver a man from an addiction, don't you think God can deliver a company from apathy? Pastor, if God can deliver an addict, don't you think He can deliver the members in your church? Believe Him for it! Ask Him for it! Believe it until you see it!

**The trap many leaders fall into is the trap of success. They cling to approval, likes, listens, and views on their last video. If you're not careful, you'll end up checking how many likes you have on your last post—you know, to see if you're a valuable person or not. That may be blunt or a bit harsh, but if we're honest, we're all a bit insecure. We all, at times, crave attention or feel the need to be "liked." Pun intended. In our social media world, it would seem that our success can be quickly calculated by the number of shares, views, followers or likes. But is that truth? Is that how God sees us? Is that what God wants us to think?**

Sure, making an impact on many people or more people is a great thing, but to crave or even to need to sense that we're "successful" is not what God wants. God the Father doesn't want you to be successful—at least in the way the world defines it. God wants you to be successful in the way He defines it. He wants you to be significant, to simply be His son or daughter, to know how incredibly loved you are by Him. He wants you to comfort and love people in their time of need, expressing His unwavering Fatherly love for them. He wants His love to so fill you that you actually overflow with it. He wants your cup to run over with His goodness. When this happens—when you invite His presence to be the most important and the most treasured part of your life—you'll discover that your friendship is *significant* in the lives of people. You can only be significant in the lives of a few, even if you're successful in the eyes of many. Here is where you'll find your greatest joy and truest calling: just being loved as a son or daughter of God and then sharing that love with a brother or sister in God's family. Sonship is where it's at. As leaders in God's kingdom, we are sons and daughters aiming to bring more people into the family! **We are aiming to bring more people into God's family, more people to an awareness of Father God's love. Anything more than that is polluted.**



## Promise | Reality | Obstacles | Character Tests | Endurance | Success | **SONSHIP**

Being a child of God is the greatest joy and honor for us. If you miss this truth, you miss the meaning of life, and you'll miss the joy of leading people. If you aim for greatness as a leader but forget that you're first a child of God, you'll push people down to get to the top, only to find the top a very lonely place.

If you aim for greatness as a leader but forget that you're first a child of God, you'll believe the lie that you are great all on your own. You're only great because God made you great. You're only gifted because God gave you gifts.

If your joy and happiness in life are tied up in only your achievements, you'll be missing the joy God intends you to have—joy that can only come through relationship with Father God and relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Life is about people, not projects.

You'll strive and strive, and although you'll hit goals, you'll be constantly longing for more. When you get a revelation of sonship, when you know that you're already completely loved by Father God, you'll have peace and contentment that last far beyond the goals reached or missed, the success or failure of a product or program. Ironically, the more quickly you understand this, the more risks you'll take, because when you know you're loved by Father God, no matter what happens, you're liberated to take risks!

Romans 8:29 (NLT) states, "For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." I wonder, if we were more concerned with being a son instead of a success, how much trouble we would save ourselves. I wonder, if we leaders valued sonship and the heart of this scripture more than being "right" or "successful," how much more peace we'd have in our hearts and minds.

I remember a Saturday night when I was scared to death. It was late February, and that January I had just become the lead pastor of Rock of Grace church in Kinsman, Ohio. It's an amazing church that my dad and mom brought to a place of health over their twenty-six years of pastoring. I was going to share the vision for our church buying a building in a neighboring town to plant another church and, eventually, build a ministry training center called David University.

*I remember thinking, God, I've only been pastor for eight weeks, and they're going to think I'm crazy! Lord, what if I fail? What if they actually believe me and receive this vision, we buy a building, plant a church . . . and nobody comes!?! Lord, what if . . . ? These questions continued to race through my mind all the way until Sunday morning. I remember literally saying out loud, "I'm not going to say it. I'm not going to mention the buildings or all the ideas. I'll just mention a church. I've only brought it up to a few people, so it's not a big deal." As I rambled on and on to the Lord telling Him why His plan wasn't going to work, all of a sudden, I heard the Lord interrupt my racing thoughts.*

*He said, Jordan, you are my son. I'm going to love you no matter what. No matter if this fails or if it's a huge success, my love for you won't change. What we have together, that's not going to change.*

*And I thought, Wow, Father. You are so right! Why should I be so concerned with being a failure in the eyes of people if everything doesn't work out great? Why was that causing me to worry? Father, I'm at peace and full of joy just in knowing You!*

Why worry and fear about looking like a failure when Proverbs clearly tells us that the fear of man is a snare? When I feel that I've heard from the Lord, I want to come to a place where I just instantly obey and trust Him completely. I want to fully trust that He's able to help me accomplish what He's asking me to do. I think that's a big part of what faith means. I think that's what many of today's leaders are missing—the faith to believe the promise God's given them. Does God ever interrupt your racing thoughts of fear, worry, and self-induced anxiety? I hope He does. I hope you let Him speak as in 1 John 3.

Jesus is the one who made sonship possible! When God sent Jesus into the world to die for us, it was to rescue us from the sin that was leading us to eternal death. We were on our way to being separated from God and His light and life forever. But then Jesus came! Jesus is the "new and living way" and He's the only one who lived a sinless life; therefore He's the only one who could do what He did. He died in our place—my place, your place! Isaiah 53:5 (NIV) says, "The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." Inside and out, we who've accepted Jesus Christ as the one who saved us have been changed into a new creation! We have gone from enemies to friends and from friends to family!

We are the children of God! We sit at His table! He provides for us! He cares for us! He is our Father, our Abba, whom we love more than anything. Jesus has made that possible!

We are the children of God! We sit at His table! He provides for us! He cares for us! He is our Father, our *Abba*, whom we love more than anything. Jesus has made that possible! And here's the point I want to make: we did nothing to deserve sonship. In fact, we deserved death. We deserved eternal separation from God due to our sins and all the times we've chosen to be selfish instead of generous, rude instead of kind, and demanding instead of giving. Jesus earned it. Jesus paid it all. Jesus achieved this liberty from sin for us! Jesus endured the cross so that we could be adopted as sons and daughters of God Himself!

## SONSHIP IS EVERYTHING

The ironic thing is that, although this is the "last stage" of a leader's journey, it should be the first also. Why? The culmination of our lives is to be children of God and to stand in that truth. This is who you are before you're a leader and before you're gifted. Sonship isn't achieved; it's received. It's a gift—a gift of identity given by our Father in heaven.

Before you're talented, before your awards or achievements, you are loved as a son or daughter of God; and that is the most invigorating, life-giving truth that brings meaning to your existence. If you miss this, you miss it all. If you are successful and achieve your goals and yet never find friendship and intimacy with God as Your Father, you've missed not only the meaning of leadership but also the meaning of life. If you make millions as a Christian businessman yet forget that you were blessed to be a blessing because your Father God is Abraham's Father God, then you will have missed it all. If you're a pastor and your church becomes a megachurch reaching thousands every weekend, and you buy into the lie that your identity and value are determined by the number of people listening to you, then you've missed it. Let God return you to the joy of sonship.

Maybe you started out on the right path, eager to please God, but when you began reading this book, you felt the unsettling conviction in your heart. Maybe you've begun to pray these brave prayers. Maybe you've found in the reflection that there are insecurities and fears that race through your mind daily. If this is the case, I encourage you to give those to the Lord and find your identity completely in Him and in Him alone. Find your identity as a leader first in sonship!

Abide in Christ alone. Don't try to abide in your position at work or your perceived place of success. Instead, find joy and rest in knowing that you are unconditionally, unequivocally loved by Father God, the One who made you. You are fully known and yet fully loved, Scripture says. Whether you "succeed" or not, God your Father loves you to pieces. Your picture is on His fridge!

Yes, He has “plans to prosper you and make you successful” as Jeremiah 29:11 says. Yes, He has plans to “make you the head and not the tail *if you obey Him,*” according to Deuteronomy 28:13. While these things are true, God’s first priority for you is your heart, not what your hand can build. He wants you to know Him! He wants you, like it says in Matthew 6:33, to make His kingdom *first* in your life! He wants to extend His love to the nations through you!

## THE P.R.O.C.E.S.S. OF A LEADER

But before He blesses you, before He uses you, He just wants you to be His! More than anything else, He wants a genuine relationship with you. He wants to hear from you. He wants to know your concerns, what makes you tick, what your dreams are. He wants it all. He wants to talk with you. He wants to befriend you. This is why Jesus gave His life! He did it not just to give you eternal life *then* but to give you real life *now!* You can know God personally! Talk to Jesus!

## UNIQUELY LOVED

I have four daughters. Yeah, pray for me. I’m already giving awkwardly long, scary looks to the neighborhood boys, trying to scare them away. I recently slowly cocked a long-barrel pellet gun in my driveway as they rode by on their bikes. They didn’t know it was a pellet gun. Hey, it’s suburbia. You do what you gotta do.

My daughters are each so different and so uniquely loved. I am IN LOVE with each of them. They are the joy of my heart! It doesn’t change my love for them if they ever break a sports record or become a success in the eyes of people. It doesn’t matter if they get a PhD. Would I be proud of them? Of course! Would I commend them? Of course! But would my love for them change? Nope. Not one bit. If they became a successful minister or leader or doctor or businesswoman, I wouldn’t love them more. Their achievements have no impact on my love for them. Guess what? Even their biggest blunders will still have zero impact on my love for them. Why? They are my daughters! Period. When they know this, they can find so much joy and rest in that truth—the truth that Mom and I love and like them, no matter what happens. The same is true for you and me. Leader, you are liked and loved by God well before you do anything to impress Him. Your guilt and your goals have zero impact on God’s unique and personal love for you. Zero.

While this book is going to encourage you to make a greater impact for Jesus, this impact must never be at the expense of sonship. In fact, it’s sonship that becomes the cause of the impact. My goal is that your ministry and leadership take on a whole new

motive. My prayer is that you are motivated to be a great leader not to impress God but to obey God. My prayer is that you don't aim to impress people or to appear great. But my prayer is that you are motivated to be a great leader simply as a response to Father God's great love for you and for the world. My prayer is that your motive changes to simply bringing more children into God's family.

## | THE PROCESS OF A LEADER APPLY IT

### **Group Discussion Guide | P.R.O.C.E.S.S. | Week 1**

I'm asking that you take some time every week with a group of Christian leaders and discuss the questions below. There are some things we simply can't learn without the authentic community of other believers. As leaders or soon-to-be leaders, you'll be able to relate to one another in a unique way. Others have experienced a trial or life lesson that they can share with you. They have had a revelation of God's love in a different aspect than you have had—I'm certain of it. Discussing what we learn in each chapter will enable you to go further faster. You'll learn from one another's mistakes and mountain-top experiences. Don't skip the "Apply It" section at the end of each chapter, even if it means going through the questions alone with self-reflection.

There are three altogether, so I encourage you to set aside three times when you can gather for just 20 to 30 minutes to discuss with other Christian leaders what you're reading together.

» Do you agree that most Christian leaders go through the P.R.O.C.E.S.S. outlined in Chapter 1? Who is a leader you can name who went through the "process" before attaining the influence they have today? Describe what took place.

» Without delay, name a leader that you look up to—someone you respect the most. Now, going around the room, share the character traits that you like about these individuals. You may find that the same character traits that are in Jesus are those you aspire to the most as we read this book together.

» Let's make this personal. What part of the process are you in right now? There are times when we'll hit these different phases again and again. Is there an obstacle that you faced years ago that tested your character and integrity? Is there an obstacle you're facing right now?

» Why is it tempting to want to be known as “successful,” and what is it about this that reveals our sinful nature? Why do we sometimes crave accolades, “likes,” position, or power?

» In your group, read Matthew 4:1–11. Discuss what Satan offered Jesus and why. Is it possible that Satan was actually offering something to Jesus that was already His, given to Him by the Father? Satan offered Him what? Power? Fame? Satan tempted Him to “prove” himself. Jesus already knew His identity—a loved child of God!

» Ask someone in your group to read Luke 15, the story of the Prodigal Son. Consider the following questions: Why was the older brother mad? What did the father do to celebrate the son that came home? What does this tell you about God the Father’s love for you? If you had to pick, which character in the story most resembles you and why? Do you see yourself as the forgiven and thankful son or the jealous older brother? Discuss this statement: **Religion is when you try to earn what the Father has already given.**

**I hope you enjoyed this free sample of my new book. You can buy the book at Amazon by searching “Jordan Biel The Process of a leader” or visit [www.TheProcessofaLeader.com](http://www.TheProcessofaLeader.com)**