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**- Cheryl Lee Davis**

# Transformed Leaders

## Prioritizing communion with Christ

By Cheryl Lee Davis

**OVERWHELMED WITH THE PRESSURES** and demands of the preceding months, I turned to my husband in desperation and asked, “How am I going to make it through this day?” Knowing what the day held, he answered, “Just put your hand in Christ’s hand and together walk through every hour.”

God’s call to every leader is first and foremost to himself.

*“God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:9)*

The most influential leaders in my life are not solely defined by their strategic abilities, their relational skill or even their strong vision. No, the most influential leaders show deep faith, leadership, people investment and a core awareness that Christ is preeminent.

I watched as a leader gave life to an organization even as her family experienced personal loss. A pastor forged ahead amidst betrayal from a fellow pastor. Another leader made himself accessible for encouragement and constructive feedback despite a demanding schedule. Each of these leaders displayed dependence upon God, and their lives communicated godly leadership.

Spiritual leadership springs not simply from a regular quiet time with God. Don’t get me wrong, daily and significant time spent with God is vital. I depend on it! But the depth of spiritual growth we need is often discovered in the vulnerable shaping of our lives. This chiseling produces leadership that shows every day as we walk hand in hand with Christ, where he leads. We rely on his wisdom and strength, and we become the leaders he wants us to be. Our transformation shows in how we lead, how we treat those around us. We can study, pray and know the Bible in and out, but if it does not sink in and seep out of who we are, what good is it?

As leaders in the body of Christ, we lead to help the poor, share the gospel and serve the abused and forgotten. Still, we must take great care to remember that our service to God is not the primary expression of our relationship with him. The primary expression of our relationship with him is simply our relationship with him. Indeed, our relationship with God through Jesus Christ is not a means to an end.

Our relationship with God *is* the end.

It *is* what matters.

Spiritual leaders spend time with God. Simply put, you and I need God. We need to be with the one who loves us more than any other. God awaits his leaders to spend time, lots of time, with him. He longs to reveal much to us about himself. He longs to guide us through the extremely difficult assignment we have. But we need

to be with him to find this out. We need to be alone with him, listening as he gently guides. Along the way, in the midst of challenges, he reveals more of himself to us.

Spiritual leaders acknowledge our role is not simply to strategize or advance the kingdom — all good, by the way. Our lives of leading reveal something greater to our teams and those around us. Our lives exclaim, “Jesus commands my life — yes, even my work life.”

Spiritual leaders influence the people around them to know God — and to become more like Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we humble ourselves, we take the back seat, we serve. When another offends us, and they will, we turn the other cheek. When another gets promoted, we rejoice with her. We forgive. We love deeply. We ask God to give us eyes to see every person as he does. We wait when everyone else seems to be chasing the next greatest thing. We stop to talk with a team member who struggles. Spiritual leadership means we look for God in every situation, even the most difficult.

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### WHY SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP?

Our spiritually strengthened lives make Christ known. How will I truly communicate the comfort of God if I have never been on a path that requires me to be comforted by the Almighty? How will I help others see God as provider unless I have experienced such a deep well of lack that I lean on and receive his provision? And, what makes me run to God for his rich wisdom and creativity unless I have drudged through the muddy path of weak strategies and an unfulfilled mission?

Every circumstance, every season can be an opportunity to lead spiritually.

*“He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” (Ps. 23:3 ESV)*



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## THE MOST DIFFICULT OF SEASONS

Sometimes the challenges are put on us — a boss asks us to do something immoral, a colleague regularly escapes pain through excessive food or alcohol consumption, team members slip into affairs, or a trusted leader gossips. Sometimes, we bring on the difficulty. Insecurity rules our lives and keeps us from leading with confidence. Unhealthy personal or business relationships distract from what is important, or power, control or jealousy cause us to make decisions that hurt the organization. The list is long. You fill in the blanks.

And, every day we face an enemy who wants to destroy us. He wants to distract us with menial and certainly temporal temptations. As leaders in the army of God, we must be equipped, strengthened and armored up to address the foul and fiery darts launched our way.

So how can we appreciate the convergence of the difficult issues that face us today with God's amazing plan for us? How do we view every season as a God-present space and therefore a place for us to grow and help others grow?

No pat answers — just a few thoughts to ponder:

**1. Keep God as your focal point.** Our life, our leadership, our everything, is brought into focus by God. One organization adjusted its once weekly prayer time to three times per week to help staff and donors experience a commitment to prayer. How can we adjust our strategic planning, our daily operations, even the culture of our organization to reflect a reliance upon God?

**2. Remember that God is present.** It's easy to get discouraged and distracted in the midst of the weirds and crazies. And believe me, I've seen a lot of both! But every moment of your life is in perfect view of your Creator. He is near and available. Believe that he entrusted you with these people, plans and your ministry. Believe that he will use all of it for his good. Keep leading. The enemy taunts Christian leaders to question their God-given call. Don't give up. Don't resist your current assignment. Don't deny God's activity within it. Don't despise where he placed you. You are in full view of God and you need to lead like he put you there.

**3. Be diligent.** Often we look for a peaceful path as if peace is the evidence of strong leadership. The truth is that leadership is complicated. Be intentional about the plans you lay out. God helped you with those plans, and he will help you carry them out.

**4. Lead humbly.** In my experience, the humble leaders I know traveled a singular path. They experienced humiliation. It's a difficult path but a God-ordained one. And one that specifically shapes you to serve the people around you. Have you experienced unjust treatment? Have you ever been overlooked or given an assignment that is beneath your skill? Accept it. Embrace this season as one of God's gifts to you where he shapes you into the woman or man he desires.

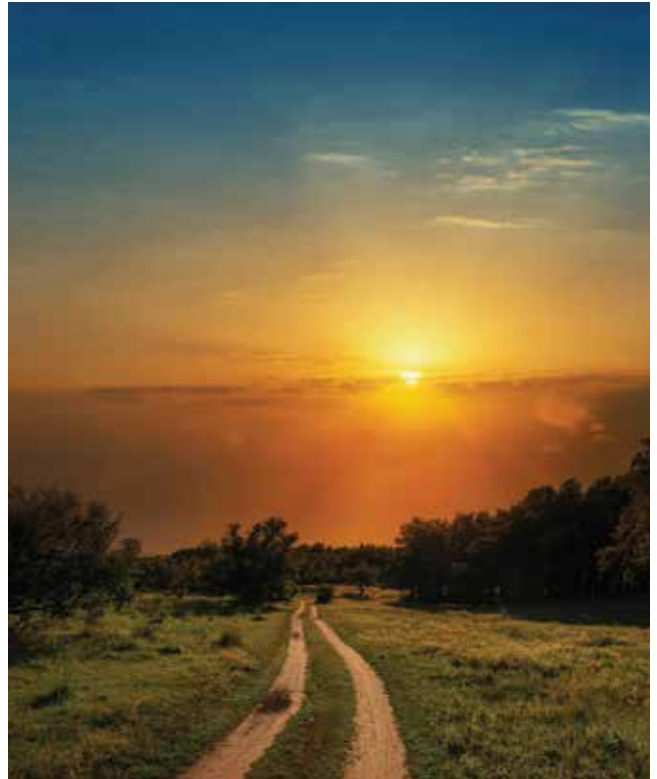
**5. Be a surrendered leader.** As leaders, we need to remove garments of entitlement, achievement, ambition and the special cloak of "I waited a long time for this and now it's my turn." A surrendered leader is one who knows who she or he serves. Submission is not a dirty word. It's an understood positioning that God is indeed above all, in all and through all. Clothe yourself with Christ.

## A SELF-EXAMINED LIFE

So, how are you doing? If I asked your staff what is the primary quality they admire in you, would they say, "My supervisor walks closely with Jesus"?

Today God beckons. God calls his leaders to be world-shapers. But we cannot, we simply will not make a difference if we do not prioritize communion with him.

I am tempted to dismiss some of the most difficult seasons I've experienced in leadership. Then, Christ, in his gentle way, reminds me that my hand is in his, and we walk together. He is enough. ●



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