



innovatechurch

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CONTENTS

Introduction: Innovation of Ideas	1
<i>Jonathan Falwell</i>	

LEADERSHIP

Chapter 1: Overcoming Discouragement in Order to Lead	11
<i>Jonathan Falwell</i>	
Chapter 2: Leading from the Middle of the Pack	21
<i>Doug Randlett</i>	
Chapter 3: Everything Rises and Falls on Leadership	37
<i>Jonathan Falwell</i>	
Chapter 4: Leading the Volunteer Family	45
<i>Matt Willmington</i>	

WORSHIP

Chapter 5: Innovate Worship	63
<i>Charles Billingsley</i>	

DISCIPLESHIP

Chapter 6: What Is God's Will for My Life? Disciple!	87
<i>Rod Dempsey</i>	
Chapter 7: What Is God's Will for My Church? Discipleship!	101
<i>Rod Dempsey</i>	

OUTREACH

- Chapter 8: Outreach: Back to Basics in Strategic Planning 117
David Wheeler
- Chapter 9: Innovate Outreach: Back to Basics in Strategic
Harvesting 133
David Wheeler

CHURCH PLANTING

- Chapter 10: The Why of Church Planting 151
Dave Earley
- Chapter 11: The How of Church Parenting 167
Dave Earley

APOLOGETICS

- Chapter 12: Sheep, Goats, and Wolves: Jude Answers Why
We Should Do Apologetics in the Church 191
Ergun Caner
- Chapter 13: What Is Worth Defending in the Postmodern
Culture? 205
Ed Hindson

CULTURE

- Chapter 14: Pastors Engaging the Culture 225
J. M. Smith
- Chapter 15: The Ins and Outs of Engaging the Culture 237
Mat Staver

PRAYER

- Chapter 16: Innovative Prayer in the Local Church 249
Daniel Henderson
- Chapter 17: Innovate: Faith-Praying 261
Elmer Towns
- Contributors 275

CHAPTER 1

Overcoming Discouragement in Order to Lead

by Jonathan Falwell

In 1998 Gary L. McIntosh and Robert L. Edmondson wrote a book titled *It Only Hurts on Monday: Why Pastors Quit and What You Can Do about It*. The authors found that the demands and difficulties of ministry were so great that many pastors were unable to properly cope with the challenge. The title of the book came about when one pastor, who was asked how his ministry was going, replied, “It only hurts on Monday.”

I’m sure most pastors understand that sentiment. Sundays can be difficult days for many pastors. And men who are unprepared to function in the multifaceted and trying world of a pastor typically do not remain in the ministry. Mondays become days of recovery and healing for many battered pastors. It would be easy to get discouraged if one’s ministry was weighing this way on someone.

A few years ago pollster George Barna found that the average lifespan of a pastor in 1993 was only about four years. They

just weren't prepared for leadership. In their book McIntosh and Edmondson found that loneliness, burnout, an inadequate education and unrealistic ministry expectations were among the key reasons former pastors cited for giving up the ministry.

Writing as a man who has, on occasion, wondered whether I was really prepared to lead a church—and a church that my father lead so graciously and naturally for more than half a century, at that—my heart goes out to men who have found themselves so burdened by ministry that they were unable to carry on. I'm sure there are many pastors in our nation today who are discouraged in ministry or even on the brink of quitting. I want to direct this portion of our book on church innovation to them.

I believe the primary reason behind the discouraging rise of pastors either defaulting or stepping down from their roles is that they did not receive the proper training to prepare them for the treacherous job of leading a flock of believers. It certainly is not a job for those without proper grounding—and thick skins.

Tragically there are many *former* pastors in our nation who bear deep scars gained in ministry. I believe many of these battle scars can be avoided if pastors are properly and prayerfully prepared for leadership. In this chapter I want to focus on four key commitments to which every pastor needs to adhere so that he is equipped to lead his congregation. I want to examine what I call four “Non-negotiable Commitments” that I believe pastors need to make to themselves and to God.

Non-negotiable Commitment 1: “I will remain spiritually intimate with my Savior.”

A senior pastor is mandated to provide spiritual guidance and instruction to his congregation (see 2 Tim. 4:2). At the same time, a senior pastor is supposed to personally live out what he preaches so the people within his congregation can have a concrete example to follow (see Phil. 3:17). Therefore, I believe that it is difficult (and probably impossible) for a senior pastor to encourage his

people to cultivate a spiritual intimacy with the Lord if he is not spending time in intimate worship with Jesus Christ.

A pastor cannot get so involved in the good and honorable work of the ministry to the point that his efforts replace the necessary one-on-one time with God. Too many pastors have neglected their personal growth in Christ in order to facilitate the spiritual growth of their flock. This leads to spiritual stagnancy. And when a pastor gets to such a point, he will soon discover that his leadership becomes ineffective. As pastors, we must determine that we will make time for our own focused time with Christ.

When I think of this commitment to remain spiritually intimate with my Savior, I often find myself reflecting on our Lord's words to Martha in Luke 10:38–42:

While they were traveling, He entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, "Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand."

The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her."

Martha was doing an honorable task of preparing dinner for the Lord. And there was certainly nothing wrong with her desire to make ready a meal for Him. Even so, our Lord gave His own assessment of the weight of each task. Jesus provided an evaluation of working rigorously versus growing spiritually.

Jesus emphasized that cultivating intimacy with God should always be the priority in our lives. First, Jesus taught Martha, "But one thing is necessary." He made it abundantly clear that saturating

your mind with God's Word is not simply a *nice* thing to do; it is a *necessary* thing to do.

Second, Jesus taught us, through His conversation with Martha, that saturating our minds with God's Word is not simply a *good* choice to make; it is the *best* choice to make ("Mary has made the right choice").

Third, Jesus showed us that saturating our mind with God's Word will not simply make a *temporary* impact; it will make an *eternal* impact ("it will not be taken away from her").

I believe that Jesus' words in this passage are crying out to pastors, especially those who are in need of encouragement. He is calling you to spiritually support your service to Him! Pastors, we must lead from a heart that remains intimate with our Savior. That intimacy comes only from regular *quantity* time with Him.

Non-negotiable Commitment 2:

"I will always preach against sin, even when it becomes unpopular."

As a ministry grows, senior pastors are sometimes confronted with the temptation to water down the truth of the gospel, either for the sake of popularity or conformity. That is why a pastor must hold this commitment close to his heart and remind himself of it every time he stands up to preach the Word of God. My father often said, "God didn't call me to be popular; He called me to be faithful."

Within the first year after I became shepherd of the Thomas Road Baptist Church flock, this non-negotiable commitment began to resonate in my heart. In fact, I was so passionate about standing upon biblical doctrine that I intentionally scheduled a sermon series that would serve to bolster my commitment to preaching the Word to a generation that has come to believe that truth is often relative. This series was titled, "iTruths: Life Lessons for the iPod Generation."

I based this sermon series on three verses that I believe should be imbedded into every pastor's mind:

- John 8:32: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
- John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."
- John 6:68–69: "Lord, who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God!"

The pressure to compromise on biblical truth can come from unlikely sources and at improbable times. And so a pastor must be committed to standing on the truth of God's Word.

Non-negotiable Commitment 3: "I will not minister to my church at the expense of my family."

This is a very practical but vital commitment that must be made prior to entering the ministry, especially the senior pastorate. I frequently tell my congregation that I will always hold to the belief that the order of priorities for me as a pastor is this:

God first.

My family second.

My ministry third.

Isn't it interesting that when God lists the qualifications of a pastor in 1 Timothy 3, there is more elaboration surrounding the qualifications related to the pastor's family than any other qualifications? I believe God wants us to make sure we give solemn thought to our families' spiritual growth. It is always heartbreaking to learn of a pastor with a prominent ministry who has failed to properly lead his family.

Not long ago I was asked to travel along on a Christian cruise where I would speak to a number of other pastors. I saw this as a

great opportunity for Christian fellowship and to take my wife and children on a vacation where we could spend some quality time together. One morning, prior to one of my speaking times, I made sure that my wife, Shari, and our four kids were where they needed to be on the ship. I then made my way to the ballroom where I was to speak. Just before I was to step to the podium, though, I noticed my youngest son, Nicholas, standing at one of the ballroom doors. I slipped out to see what was wrong. He was upset because he couldn't find Shari, who was apparently not where I told him she would be. I asked a friend to walk Nicholas down to that area to help him find his mother and everything seemed OK.

I returned into the ballroom and was introduced to speak. However, just after I began my presentation to the pastors, someone approached me and whispered that Nicholas was back in the hallway, crying uncontrollably. I apologized to the audience and quickly walked off the stage. My son was still upset and he wanted me. Let me tell you, that group of pastors was important to me, but not nearly as important as my son. I spent the rest of the afternoon with him because I felt it was the most important thing I could do that day.

This is the mind-set that we must all have as pastors. We must protect our families at all times. We must be there for them when they need us. My dad asked a very important question from the pulpit on several occasions: "What would it profit a pastor to gain the whole world and lose his own children?" This simple paraphrase of Scripture is one that I hold dear. A pastor must always ensure that his wife and children have an emotional and spiritual foundation that they know will never fail.

Non-negotiable Commitment 4: "I will not quit when I feel defeated."

Building a ministry takes time, patience, endurance, and prayer. It is hard work and, at times, can be physically, emotionally, and

spiritually grueling. In fact, I doubt that a person who has never served as a pastor can fully understand the burdens that we sometimes bear. Here's the good news: God is bigger than any of the problems we face in ministry.

My dad was a faithful leader, one that never compromised on truth but never failed to reach out in compassion to those who had fallen. It is my prayerful intention to also serve at Thomas Road Baptist Church for as many years as the Lord gives me breath and ability (unless, of course, He calls me to another duty). Pastors cannot base their ministry lives on the cut-and-run mentality that is so prevalent in our society. A pastor must be committed to his flock, without thought of personal gain or future reward. Pastors must be willing to stay the course for as long as God calls them to service in their place of ministry.

Of course, pastors are going to face challenges—and some huge ones, at that. The Bible tells us that “man is full of troubles.” Pastors aren't immune to the struggles of life. In fact, our troubles are more acute because we must not only deal with the problems we face, but also those that many in our congregations face. And so we must be ready to allow God to see us through our storms, instead of leaving our post when the challenges become severe and trying.

Pastors need to make a personal contract that says: “Quitting is never an option.” This contract means that we will not walk away in the face of adversity. It means that we will stand firm on God's Word, confident that it is He whom we serve.

I want to address a couple of questions that may arise in the minds of pastors reading this book.

Question: What if I have already compromised in these commitments?

Answer: Confess your shortcomings to God and commit to change, with His help, today. We worship the God of the second chance, third chance, fourth chance, and so on. Just look at the life of Peter or Paul or Matthew or King David to see how God was willing to forgive and bless. He doesn't want to cut you

down and leave you bleeding in the dirt. God not only forgives and restores, He empowers those who desire to serve Him with wisdom and understanding to make the right decisions in the future. This is how we gain godly wisdom. Don't let past failures or doubts weigh you down. Cast your burdens on Christ and carry on in ministry.

Question: I have made these types of commitments to my ministry. But how can I ensure that I remain true to them?

Answer: Rehearse these commitments regularly and renew them daily so as to tether your heart to them. As the writer of Hebrews says: "We must therefore pay even more attention to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away" (Heb. 2:1).

It is a humbling thought to realize that, as leaders, virtually all things in our lives and ministries rise and fall on our ability to lead. For several years prior to my father's passing, I served on the Thomas Road Baptist Church staff in a variety of positions. As I served alongside him, I felt a certain freedom because I always knew there was someone above me who would use great wisdom in making the important decisions for our church. I knew that he never made a crucial decision apart from prayer.

Now that I am in the same role as my father, I realize with new clarity the heady truth that leadership is sometimes not very fun. The fact is that I am not capable of leading this church and making the important decisions for our congregation apart from constantly leaning upon Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 3:5 (NKJV), we are told, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."

Pastor, has ministry worn you down? Are you struggling to find or rediscover your footing in ministry? Do you feel like you are unable to properly lead your congregation? If so, please allow me to remind you that you are not sufficient to come out of your distress alone. Apart from casting your cares on our great God and allowing Him to minister to you and lead you through whatever trials are afflicting your ministry, you will almost surely fail.

But there's hope! I encourage you to reclaim 2 Corinthians 3:5 and remember that your sufficiency is indeed from God. In my brief tenure as senior pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church I have needed to be reminded of this great truth on many occasions. Whenever I am facing problems in ministry, I take time to focus on this wonderful verse. As a result, my greatest joy is knowing that God is working through me. Allow Him to have His way in your life. Humbly recommit to serving Him and I assure you that you will discover amazing new joys and blessings in ministry.