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# The Challenge of Empowerment

## *The Heart Required for Developing Leaders*

Far too many pastors face a common dilemma. They want to develop leaders at every level in their church, but they continue to live with an overloaded ministry schedule that keeps them from training new leaders. Yet the real problem is not busyness; it is what lies behind the busyness. Lurking beneath the long hours and the never-ending task list is a reluctance to empower others.

The typical pastor has too many balls to juggle. His greatest need is not more balls to throw in the air or more time to perform or more juggling tips; his greatest need is more jugglers—individuals who can lead ministry under his guidance. Yet many pastors are reluctant to recognize this need and, if honest, must answer the following question in the negative: As a leadership development process is implemented, will you be able to give ministry away to other leaders? Many are not sure how they will face one of a leader's greatest challenges—the challenge of empowerment.

The juggling metaphor is helpful in introducing the idea of empowerment. Empowerment represents a point in the leadership-development process when a leader stops juggling one of his balls and hands it to someone else, an “emerging juggler,” so to speak. This handoff is critical because no amount of classroom training, reading, practicing, or mentoring can produce a juggler without the handoff. Likewise, no amount of leadership development can produce a leader without empowerment.

Therefore, understanding and applying the concept of empowerment are essential to developing leaders.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear definition of empowerment and practical direction on how to empower others. It fits in the preparation section of the book because any effort to develop leaders without a commitment to empowerment is futile. It is also appropriate here because the act of empowerment places unique demands on the leader's heart. As with any heart-level development issue, time for growth is required. Therefore, it is in the leader's best interest to confront these demands early in the process. To help leaders work on the heart level, this chapter provides "heart-building exercises" that will develop courage and conviction for empowering others.

## Empowerment Defined

Many authors use the term *empowerment* when writing about leadership, but few pause to define it. For the sake of clarity, let's start with a definition: *Empowerment is the intentional transfer of authority to an emerging leader within specified boundaries from an established leader who maintains responsibility for the ministry.*

Let's explore the components of this definition. First, empowerment involves an *intentional* transfer. *Intentional* means that the transfer is deliberate and thought through ahead of time. Before ministry authority is given away, a degree of assessment and planning is required. The established leader must answer important questions such as:

- What ministry areas require my direct attention and which ones do not?
- What are the most strategic ministry areas at this time (and therefore require emerging leader involvement)?
- Who qualifies as an emerging leader?
- What are the passions and gifts of the emerging leader?
- How will the transfer of authority take place?

If a leader does not think through questions like these, the act of giving away ministry will be hasty or haphazard and can lead to problems down the road. These problems vary, depending on the ministry, but they all flow from the same basic principle. The quality of the emerging leader's ongoing ministry performance is directly related to the quality of his or her initiation as a leader. In the end, the failure to intentionally

transfer authority to emerging leaders will inhibit their development and that of their ministries.

There are two general ways for an unintentional transfer to occur. The first relates to the personal limitations of the established leader, limitations such as inexperience or insufficient training. Even for experienced leaders, factors such as stress, lack of time, or apathy contribute to a sloppy handing over of ministry. The second way an unintentional transfer happens is when someone acts like an emerging leader who is not an emerging leader at all. In other words, an individual may assume authority where none is granted. This occurs in some cases by malicious aggression and in others by honest mistake. In either case, when someone seizes authority by his or her own initiative rather than receiving it from an established leader, empowerment is not taking place.

Now to the second component of the definition. Empowerment is about *authority*. Authority is decision-making power. The heart of empowerment is the transfer of decision-making control over an area of ministry. To understand the significance of this transfer, think about teaching someone to drive a car. The student driver must first study the rules of the road, watch more experienced drivers, and learn how to operate the vehicle. But the student cannot actually drive the car until he or she sits in the driver's seat—the place of decision-making power. For the student driver to sit in the driver's seat, the existing driver must take his hands off the wheel and move over. The transfer of authority is clear because only one person at a time can have his hands on the wheel and his foot on the pedal.

Keep in mind that there are many stages of learning for the student leader. If, however, the student leader never sits in the driver's seat of ministry, he or she will never become a leader. In other words, it is just as crazy to try to develop leaders without a commitment to empowerment as it is to operate a driving school without letting students sit behind the wheel of a car.

Empowerment is a transfer of authority *to an emerging leader from an established leader*. The term *emerging leader* implies that the leader is qualified to receive authority in a ministry context. The term is not limited to new leaders. The emerging leader may be starting to lead for the first time or may be emerging from one level of leadership to a higher one.

The idea of an established leader is twofold. The leader is established with respect to God. His position is rooted in true spiritual authority based on character and other spiritual guidelines for the role. The leader is also established with respect to the congregation. The church community recognizes and validates (according to its own theological tradition) the leader's character and competence.

Returning to the definition: Empowerment is the intentional transfer of authority to an emerging leader *within specified boundaries*. The boundaries clarify where and when the leader is empowered to make ministry decisions. One type of boundary is a specific ministry area, such as children's ministry or men's ministry, a specific Sunday school class or small group. Another type of boundary is the kind of decision-making power granted. A lower level of empowerment may limit decision making to tasks, while a higher level may include decisions about finances and people. Also, authority can be categorized into three basic types: inform-act authority, act-inform authority, and act authority. For a brief discussion of these types, refer to pages 104–14 of the companion volume, *Being Leaders*.

The final component of the definition is an important clause that describes the established leader as one *who maintains responsibility for the ministry*. Ultimately the established leader is accountable for the decisions made by those under him or her. By retaining responsibility, the established leader stays conscious of his or her accountability and maintains a vested interest in the ministry outcomes. In essence the established leader holds ownership or final responsibility even though the decision-making power has been transferred. This helps foster a relationship of trust and security with the emerging leader.

## Alternatives to Empowerment

To further clarify the definition of empowerment, it helps to explore the different ways an established leader keeps or gives away authority and responsibility. As we have stated, empowerment occurs when a leader gives away authority but keeps responsibility. There are three logical alternatives to empowering: directing, abdicating, and disabling. As you may guess from the terms, the last two, abdicating and disabling, carry a negative connotation because these actions inhibit leadership development. Let's take a look at each of the three.

### *Directing*

Directing occurs when the established leader keeps both authority and responsibility. In some situations directing is a good option, and in others it is not. It is a good option if there is a lack of qualified emerging leaders. For example, a new and inexperienced worship pastor may start off receiving direction from his senior pastor. He is given the program—which songs to sing and the order in which to sing them—from the senior pastor. The senior pastor does not give away authority to make

these decisions. He also keeps the responsibility. Whether the response is dynamic or poor, he takes responsibility for the result.

Directing is inappropriate in other situations. If there are qualified emerging leaders and an established leader continues to direct, he or she will hold back the leadership potential in the ministry. Many times the established leader continues to direct because he or she likes being in charge. (We will address this later in the chapter.) Let's return to our new worship pastor as an example. If the worship pastor continues to develop under the directing of the senior pastor, there may come a time when he is ready to receive authority over the music ministry. The senior pastor may resist this change from directing to empowering simply because he likes making all the decisions. In such a case, directing inhibits leader development.

### *Abdicating*

Another alternative to empowering is abdicating. This occurs when the established leader gives away both authority and responsibility. Even though this may appear to be empowering, it is not. Abdicating can actually hinder rather than promote the new leader's development. When the established leader gives away responsibility for the ministry, a vital connection is lost between the established leader and the emerging leader because the established leader no longer feels accountable for ministry outcomes.

To use the student driver illustration, imagine an instructor exiting the vehicle at the moment the student climbs behind the wheel. This shows a blatant disregard for both the driver and the car. In similar fashion an established leader who abdicates leadership is showing a blatant disregard for both the emerging leader and the ministry. This form of disregard may not be conscious on the established leader's part. In our experience, abdicating usually occurs unintentionally through neglect and is perpetuated due to stress and time constraints in the leader's life. Leaders should be careful to evaluate whether ministry they give away is a result of empowering or abdicating.

For the new worship pastor, abdicating would occur if the senior pastor gave away authority over the worship program while disowning the responsibility. To the worship pastor, the senior pastor would seem disengaged. On some Sundays the worship would go really well and on others it wouldn't. In either case the senior pastor would never comment or provide feedback on the program, making his expectations unclear. Training would never be discussed or offered. Even though the worship pastor would love to discuss the upcoming sermon series to plan musical selections better, the senior pastor would never have the time. In

this case the senior pastor is not giving away authority *to multiply* the ministry but is giving away authority *to give up* the ministry.

**Disabling**

Disabling is another alternative to empowering. It refers to the inappropriate act of giving away responsibility but keeping the authority. When this occurs, the established leader holds the emerging leader accountable for ministry outcomes without giving him or her decision-making freedom. In the context of this disempowerment, many negative scenarios result. First, it places a low ceiling on the emerging leader’s development potential. Learning is stunted because he or she never gets behind the wheel of ministry. Second, the ministry never multiplies because one person is still making all of the decisions. Third, frustration snowballs because the established leader never considers himself ultimately accountable and can blame others when problems arise.

Leaders who disable will eventually discourage emerging leaders—in many cases to the point of leaving the ministry area. Using the new worship pastor as an example, disabling occurs if the senior pastor gives the worship pastor critical feedback about a poor response from the congregation. Since the worship pastor wasn’t given authority to design the program, he should not be held responsible for the outcome of the program (assuming he did what the senior pastor told him to do).

One key to discerning leadership disablement is observing with whom the established leader communicates when problems or critical decisions arise. If a leader bypasses other leaders or emerging leaders in the organization to effect change, disabling occurs. The decision-making power has never really been given away. For example, the senior pastor is guilty of disabling if he goes straight to the pianist to cut a special music piece from the worship program instead of working with the worship pastor.

**Alternatives to Empowerment**

*(from the established leader’s perspective)*

	Promotes Leader Development		Inhibits Leader Development	
	Empowering	Directing	Abdicating	Disabling
Authority	given away	kept	given away	kept
Responsibility	kept	kept	given away	given away

Let’s return to the senior pastor and his new worship pastor to illustrate the positive aspects of empowerment. Six months have passed and the senior pastor decides to empower the worship pastor. The senior pastor still feels responsible for the outcome of the worship event, but now the authority of designing the program rests in the hands of the

worship pastor. Imagine the context that develops: The pastor looks for ways to further equip his worship pastor and build his skills. The pastor cares enough to write down his regular feedback with both strengths and weaknesses of the program. The pastor plans time to discuss future sermon series.

On the flip side, the empowered worship pastor appreciates the opportunity to make the programming decisions. (His gifts and training, as opposed to those of the senior pastor, are better suited for the role.) He feels comfortable getting input from his pastor because he knows that the pastor will not simply blame him for negative outcomes but will help him solve problems and make progress. The worship pastor knows that when critical decisions arise, the senior pastor will not go behind his back to give direction to the worship team. Best of all, the pastor openly praises the worship pastor when he does well and personally accepts the responsibility when outcomes don't go well.

Another helpful illustration of empowerment is what Jim Collins calls the pattern of "the window and the mirror."<sup>1</sup> He states that effective leaders always look out the window when things go well (acknowledging someone else's authority and good decision making) but look in the mirror when things go badly (taking responsibility for the situation).

## Empowerment Applied

Empowerment is much easier to define than it is to apply. In fact, empowerment places many demands on the heart of the spiritual leader. Any progress in implementing a leadership-development process will necessarily force leaders into a "heart-shaping gymnasium." Let's take a look at four specific challenges of empowerment. For each challenge there is an "empowerment priority" with corresponding exercises needed to build the heart.

### *Giving Up Control*

**Challenge 1:** *Empowerment increases the scope of unknown ministry outcomes.*

**Empowerment priority:** *Embrace uncertainty.*

Because empowerment increases the uncertainty of ministry outcomes, the leader's inordinate desire for control will be confronted. By simply involving others in the decision-making process, the potential for new ideas and different decisions multiplies, leading to a greater variety of ministry results. One result could be very positive, such as

a lay leader catching a vision for a new service initiative in the community. Another may be very negative, such as a terribly unorganized special event. There is no way around the fact that empowering others requires living with greater uncertainty, and this uncertainty forces a leader to face personal issues of control.

Reggie McNeal explores this connection as he encourages leaders through the heart-shaping process of giving up control: "Some spiritual leaders are reluctant to release the control of ministry. Several factors contribute to this, including fear that the ministry quality might suffer or fear that the leader will lose some leverage in the system."<sup>2</sup> So what happens over time when fear concerning ministry quality and unknown outcomes inhibits empowerment? The leader builds an organization with systems and processes that extend his control. Then a personal problem becomes an institutionalized problem. Stacy Rinehart observes, "In the most extreme form, the need for control will insist on defining ministry in terms of loyalty to a particular group and to programs directly attached to the institution. It simply can't allow freedom and diversity in people or programs."<sup>3</sup> Another Christian leader refers to this problem as the "corruption of political clout" and explains, "Leaders who lead by political control end up cloning subordinates rather than developing new leaders."<sup>4</sup> The bottom line is that trying to empower others while retaining control over ministry is like trying to mix oil and water. Without a commitment to empowerment, it is futile to build a leader-development process.

During my (Will's) college days the foundational scientific model of the atom went through a transition. The old model was represented by a nucleus around which electrons orbited like planets around the sun. In contrast, the new model showed that electrons do not follow predictable orbits at all. Rather, electrons exist as clouds or fields represented by probability patterns. The shift from predictable pathways to probability patterns represents a paradigm shift that is required when embracing empowerment. If leaders want to walk in predictable pathways of doing ministry, kingdom expansion will be difficult if not impossible. If, however, leaders take the risk to release others toward probabilities of success, God can release atomiclike energy through our ministry efforts.

### **EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY THROUGH INCREASED FAITH**

So how should a leader face the uncertainty associated with releasing ministry to others? The answer is faith—trusting that God was, is, and always will be the author and prime mover behind all ministry activity. This includes the ministry we release. Leaders must lead with the perspective of stewardship over ministry rather than ownership of

ministry. Stewardship is being responsible for something that belongs to someone else. When leaders insist on control, they are really assuming the role of owner of people and ministry outcomes, promoting themselves to a role that only the sovereign Creator and Manager of the universe can hold.

I (Will) remember the first time this truth made its mark on my life. As a young student on the campus of Penn State, I was an enthusiastic member of Campus Crusade for Christ. By my sophomore year, I was thoroughly trained in evangelism and followed a weekly follow-up routine to share the gospel with other students. With some early success, my evangelistic prowess was affirmed. I remember the satisfaction of recounting how students had given their life to Christ because of my witnessing. Subtly the perspective of my identity began to shift from being a steward of the gospel message to being an “owner”—someone who controlled ministry outcomes.

I can remember the shock of reading Bill Bright’s definition of successful evangelism after my pride had fully taken hold of me: “Success in witnessing is simply taking initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results up to God.”<sup>5</sup> The idea of leaving the results up to God was radical, because I thought the results were tied to my effective skills in witnessing. The realization that my “success” really flowed from the work of God was a much-needed pin to my inflated head. And it is this same truth that I have needed to refresh over and over again as I have empowered others in ministry. The results are not up to me; they are up to God. God is ultimately in control. Empowerment requires seeing your ministry universe through the eyes of faith and then taking real steps of faith. This kind of faith initiative requires courage and risk taking.

When facing risk, I often remind myself of the words of Helen Keller, “Security is mostly a superstition—it does not exist in nature. Avoiding danger is not safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or it is nothing at all.” These words remind me that the control I think I possess is really an illusion. The most absurd truth about control is that we never really have it. It is God’s all along. So in the end we can either live with the illusion of control and move toward the illusion of security and predictability, or we can relinquish control to God in a way that frees us to take the risk of empowering others.

Choosing the risk of empowerment requires increased faith and prayerful dependence. It is one of many forms of uncertainty that God uses to build faith into the life of leaders. A passage in Mark 4:35–41 provides a vivid illustration of Jesus’ leading his disciples into uncertainty for the purpose of faith building. While crossing the Sea of Galilee, they encounter a sudden, life-threatening squall. Struck with panic, the

disciples shake Jesus awake and call to him in fear. After Jesus exhibits his masterful control over wind and sea, he questions his disciples with a mild rebuke, “Do you still have no faith?” It is clear that Jesus is training his disciples about issues of control. He leads them to a situation in which they are out of control so they will embrace a life of prayer and faith to participate in God’s control.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to empowerment in the local church, we think that Jesus would ask many church leaders the same question: “Do you still have no faith?” Giving away power and authority will call for leaders to embrace prayer, increase their faith, and participate in God’s control.

### **HEART-BUILDING EXERCISES: SET ONE**

A key exercise in learning to give up control is to consider the circumstances that bring out our worst tendencies to take charge. In what conditions are we most inflexible and demanding? By reflecting on these areas we can open the door to the Spirit’s work in our heart. Consider the following questions to aid the reflection process.<sup>7</sup>

- In what general areas do you gravitate toward control (people, tasks, ideas, processes, environment, and so on)?
- What types of people or roles do you tend to control (leaders, church members, pastoral staff, administrative staff, children, spouse, others)?
- In what kinds of activities do you want control (planning, problem solving, teaching/preaching, facilitating, counseling, studying, socializing)?
- What are your hot buttons (correct appearance, competition, finances, certain personality types, others)?

Everyone deals with tendencies toward control. It is simply a matter of how the tendency manifests itself. For example, I (Will) struggle in the general area of ideas and processes. I find it quite easy to assemble a group of teachers to team teach spiritual formation seminars—as long as I determine the structure and outline of the teaching content. I do not hog the actual teaching event itself, but no one better mess with my outline! An example of one of my hot buttons is church communication materials. I am ashamed to admit how many church flyers, brochures, and signs I have designed myself (late into the night) because I was unwilling to empower another leader to do it.

Each control area we identify opens the door for God to grow our faith and dependence on him. Each area sheds valuable light on personal and organizational development priorities. To the extent we fail

to counteract our control issues, we will limit the development of other leaders around us.

### ***Slowing Down***

**Challenge 2:** *Empowerment requires a sacrifice of short-term ministry efficiency.*

**Empowerment priority:** *Slow down to speed up.*

The slow-down dynamic challenges the leader's inordinate desire for expediency. Ministries carry momentum. When a ministry is going well and a leader is comfortable making the ministry decisions, it can be extremely difficult to hand off decision-making power. There is always a window of transition when the energy required to empower a new leader is greater than the energy required to keep leading oneself. During this window the threat of bogging down the ministry arises, and it is not uncommon for the leader to feel that others are sabotaging his time. We call this the sensation of apparent inefficiency. Indeed, the ministry will slow down—and that feels inefficient—but the purpose of slowing it down is to speed it up faster than it has ever gone before. It is the principle of short-term sacrifice for long-term gain. Empowerment costs something but pays huge dividends.

An illustration of this principle is the story of two lumberjacks who compete in the forest one day. After several hours of working, one lumberjack stops to take a ten-minute break, while the other keeps energetically chopping away. The same thing happens several times throughout the day. At the end of the day, the lumberjack who took the several ten-minute breaks turns out to be the one who chopped the most wood. "I can't understand it," said the other lumberjack. "How did you chop more wood than me?" "Simple," was the reply. "When I stopped chopping, I was sharpening my ax!"

This story illustrates the fact that slowing down can actually speed things up. The lumberjack was willing to feel the sensation of apparent inefficiency for the sake of long-term gain. Leaders must do the same if they are to empower others.

Unfortunately, the attractiveness of short-term effectiveness is too strong for many leaders. To complicate matters, the interest in efficiency is usually accompanied by the pride of competence. Not only can the leader do it faster, he can also do it better. And not only can he do it better, he feels good about the fact he can do it better! Many times this reality eclipses the opportunity for empowerment. All leaders face this defining moment—the choice between performing a function themselves and delegating it to someone with less experience or technical

competence. How then should the leader go about choosing the higher road of empowerment when the familiar, expedient pathways of “do it yourself” are so enticing?

### **SLOWING DOWN THROUGH INCREASED PATIENCE**

While empowerment is the higher road, the hard truth is that it is always the slower road, at least in the short run. Therefore, there is no way around the need to cultivate a heart of patience. Patience in these situations is much deeper than simply waiting. It involves a dying to self, which is very painful. In many cases it is allowing someone else to do what you love to do, what you were trained to do, and what you can do better! All the while there are external time pressures—Sunday after Sunday the ministry calendar grinds on.

During the pain of waiting, the leader must foresee the future gain. The pain can take many forms. Maybe for a few months message preparation time is limited. Maybe for the entire year, the quality of the children’s ministry suffers. Maybe for eighteen months no new small groups are launched. But eventually the waiting pays off. The right people grow and develop; ideas and resources increase; volunteer time and leadership multiplies; ministry momentum snowballs. The short window of slow-down that lasted for several months is seen from a new perspective. Over the course of years it is evident that the slow-down window was not a cost but an investment in years of increased fruitfulness.

### **HEART-BUILDING EXERCISES: SET TWO**

To walk through these slow-down periods, we must cultivate an attitude of patience. We must stay “legacy minded” rather than “expediency minded.” Consider the following action points and corresponding questions designed to expand your perspective on slowing down to speed up.

- Remember and record your own learning curve process. Who had to slow down to get you where you are today? What sacrifices in ministry time or quality did some leader make when you were training? How has his or her investment paid off?
- See the long-term potential in people. How many of your hours is it worth to develop an emerging leader who will serve faithfully for the next twenty years? When you look at an acorn, do you see a mature tree or an entire forest?
- Acknowledge that there is more than one way to accomplish a goal. Ask yourself: *Is my way the only right way when it comes to a particular ministry function? Are there other ways of getting from*

*point A to point B? Can I celebrate when another person gets to point B a different way than I would?*

- Study the example of Jesus. Did doing ministry while living with twelve men ever slow Jesus down? Did Jesus give up teaching opportunities to train others? Consider, for example, his sending out the seventy-two in Luke 10.
- Focus on the long-term benefits. Ask yourself: *What could the ministry look like if twice as many people were involved? How would this ministry be transformed if the people leading it were more passionate and talented than I am? What would my life be like if I were freed to focus on my top three priorities?*

In his classic work *Spiritual Leadership*, Oswald Sanders counts the cost of the leader's failure to slow down and empower others:

The man in the place of leadership who fails to delegate is constantly enmeshed in a morass of secondary detail that not only overburdens him but deflects him from his primary responsibilities. He also fails to release the leadership potential under him. To insist on doing things oneself because it will be done better is not only a short-sighted policy but may be evidence of an unwarranted conceit.<sup>8</sup>

But in contrast he adds, "The leader who is meticulous in observing priorities adds immeasurably to his own effectiveness." Slowing down must be a leader's priority if he wants to empower others and add "immeasurably" to the life of the church.

## ***Humility***

**Challenge 3:** *Empowerment requires giving away authority that previously provided the basis of personal ministry success.*

**Empowerment priority:** *Starve your ego.*

A third dynamic confronts the leader's inordinate desire for power, requiring him to give away authority. Once a pastor has demonstrated his ability to perform ministry tasks, choosing to empower others can easily threaten his sense of security and significance. No pastor is immune to this dynamic as it develops in almost undetectable increments. Over time a sense of personal significance develops out of career achievements rather than through the grace of Jesus Christ. To whatever degree this happens, the leader will have difficulty empowering others, because, in essence, empowering others forces the pastor to starve his own ego.

Stacy Rinehart comments on the abuse of power manifested by some Christian leaders today:

Abuses of power in our day are often more subtle. The layout of church office space, the titles we assign, the requirements for membership or being a teacher—all indicate underlying beliefs about power. Often such things are meeting the deep needs of the leaders rather than serving the people. Like Linus's security blanket in the *Peanuts* cartoon, such externals become a source of great comfort and meet a need for self-esteem and significance as well.<sup>9</sup>

For some pastors personal ministry success is enhanced by specialized ministry training and finely tuned theological knowledge. The pride of competence kicks in again. Carl George describes this problem well:

Pastors sometimes fear loss of exclusive authority in matters of guidance and advice. Each of Christendom's traditions contains certain finer points of doctrine that allow for multiple interpretation options. Some pastors have a need to be right and to be in control, lest their competence seem challenged or threatened. This kind of minister will experience difficulty in multiplying teachers, advisors, counselors, and other persons of wisdom, since these lay pastors may come to wield almost as much influence in their small groups as their senior pastor.<sup>10</sup>

How sad to think that the gift of specialized training for ministry could lead to a pride of competence that actually blocks the empowering of others for ministry!

### **STARVING YOUR EGO THROUGH INCREASED HUMILITY**

Every Christian leader struggles to some degree with the “dark side” of the soul that gravitates toward position and power. While it is not our purpose to explore the issue of sanctification, it is worth emphasizing that spiritual leaders need to continually cultivate an attitude of humility. Jesus reveals the importance of this attribute in Matthew 20 when the mother of James and John requests that her sons be promoted to vice presidents in the future kingdom. Jesus replies in verses 24–27: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” Jesus is teaching that spiritual leaders not only serve by leading, they lead by serving. In a sense leaders are called to *descend into greatness*. It is the character trait of humility, more than any other, that will impact the leader's ability to give away authority and to empower others for servant-led ministry.

Let's explore why the attribute of humility is essential for developing leaders. First, humility implies the ability to see God, self, and others accurately. In Romans 12:6–8 Paul lists several spiritual gifts, including the gift of leadership. In the context immediately preceding this section, Paul writes in verse 3, "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (NASB). The leader who thinks too highly of himself will be hard-pressed to give away authority. If for no other reason, this will happen simply because his inflated view of self translates to a deflated view of others. But the more accurately a leader sees himself and those around him, including the diversity of gifts and talents, the more likely he is to release others for ministry.

Second, humility is essential because it gives you the ability to make other people priorities, not merely looking "out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4 NASB). What happens when a pastor takes this seriously in terms of the ministry interests of those in his congregation? What happens when a leader considers the spiritual gifts of others around him as more important than his own? The answer is one word—empowerment. With this Christlike attitude, the leader will not only be open to leadership development, he will intentionally and passionately give away power and authority to others!

Finally, humility fosters gratitude for the opportunity to play a role in God's grand story of redemptive history. This gratitude helps counteract the definition of success in individualized terms. Some athletes measure their success by personal stats and some by team stats. The leader measures only team stats. An attitude of humility keeps the well-being of the church at large as the priority, with organizational success coming before personal ministry success. Otherwise, the preoccupation with self, ego, and career will act as a parasite on the organization. For a pastor's ego to thrive, the empowered church organization must die. For the empowered church organization to thrive, the pastor's ego must die.

### **THE EXPANDABLE-POWER PIE**

As a leader continues to cultivate humility, he is freed to understand and apply the principle of the expandable-power pie.<sup>11</sup> The principle contradicts the traditional and intuitive assumption that there is a fixed amount of power—that if one person has more power, then another person must have less. When leaders operate with this paradigm, they are naturally reluctant to share power.

The expandable-power-pie concept, however, means that when a leader gives away power, the total sum of power expands. It is not true that the leader has no "pie" left as he gives pieces away. On the contrary, the leader who gives away power can actually carry more influence in

the organization. In short, the leader gains power by giving away power. After reviewing extensive research on organizational leadership, James Kouzes and Barry Posner observe: “Shared power results in higher job satisfaction and performance throughout the organization . . . the more everyone in the organization feels a sense of power and influence, the greater ownership and investment they feel in the success of the organization.” The irony is that power-hungry leaders will never experience the exponential returns of the expandable-power-pie concept and in the end will wield less influence.

### HEART-BUILDING EXERCISES: SET THREE

If we accept the concept of the expandable-power pie and the importance of humility, how practically do we go about starving our ego and giving away power and authority? Again, Kouzes and Posner are helpful in outlining four key tasks.<sup>12</sup> We will state these tasks in the form of questions and encourage pastors and staff teams to review them on a weekly basis.

- What important work on critical issues will I give away?
- How will I give people discretion and autonomy over their tasks and resources?
- When will I give visibility to others and provide recognition for their efforts?
- How will I help others build relationships, connecting them with powerful people and finding them sponsors and mentors?

Obviously the cultivation of humility will be accomplished on the heart level only through the leader’s spiritual life and walk with God. These questions, however, will provide a clear diagnosis of the “ego factor.” After providing a diagnosis, the same questions can be used to push the envelope on the practice of empowerment on a regular basis.

### *Building Connection*

**Challenge 4:** *Empowerment necessitates close support and authentic community with other leaders.*

**Empowerment priority:** *Connect with others.*

The fourth dynamic of the challenge of empowerment confronts a leader’s inordinate desire for isolation. Let’s face it, many ministry leaders are so busy pouring out their lives for others that it can be difficult for them to enjoy true intimacy with others. The tendency (and

temptation) to keep people at a safe distance on the journey of ministry can be a significant obstacle to empowerment.

Think back to the definition of empowerment as an intentional transfer of authority. The leader gives something away. When people receive a gift from someone, they ask, whether consciously or subconsciously, *What is meant by this gift? Is the gift a token of genuine kindness or a strategy for manipulation?* The context and closeness of the relationship largely determine the answer. In the same way, the leader who gives away authority must think through the context and atmosphere of the leader-to-leader relationship. If the leader does not cultivate the relationship, the one being empowered may feel used.

One of the most helpful nuggets I (Will) ever received from John Maxwell is the statement, "Touch a heart before you ask for a hand." Over the years this statement has burned into my mind as I seek to empower people for ministry. The more I act on it, the more my energies get multiplied through others. I have learned that life is too short and ministry is too difficult not to enjoy connecting with our fellow servants. Remember that empowerment involves giving away authority but keeping responsibility. The best way to do this is to share life together in the process!

The sheer volume of time that Jesus spent with his disciples is amazing. The record of the Gospels is a snapshot of Jesus and his men, fishing, talking, eating, walking, training, and ministering together. Imagine the connection and intimacy Jesus nurtured when he, as the Master, washed his disciples' feet. Robert Coleman observes: "Amazing as it may seem, all Jesus did to teach these men His way was to draw them close to himself. . . . Knowledge was gained by association before it was understood by explanation."<sup>13</sup> What was Jesus' ultimate objective with this strategy of close association? Great Commission empowerment! At the end of three-plus years of doing life and ministry together, he would release twelve men to spearhead the proclamation of the gospel in the world. Jesus connected with them before he empowered them.

Likewise, I try to develop a life-on-life relationship with any leader under my care. The types of activities we do together range from breakfast to racquetball to mountain biking to family dinners to late nights at the coffee shop. It is important that the leader, who is giving the authority, be the one to initiate times together and to discover points of common interest. Before looking for entirely new things to do together, try to find areas of overlap that exist already.

Years ago, when I first began to develop a relationship with Aubrey, I was impressed by his approachability despite his being a seminary professor and author. I can remember talking about life and ministry

in between sets of lifting weights at the Baylor Fitness Center, located near the Dallas Seminary campus. One time I gleaned pointers from his romantic savvy as he showed me a very creative valentine gift package he was preparing for his wife. (I was taking mental notes as fast as I could!) Don't underestimate the importance of connections like these when building a relationship that is conducive to empowerment.

### **CONNECTING WITH OTHERS THROUGH INCREASED LOVE**

A basic question that every Christian leader should ask is *Do I love leading more than I love the people I lead?* or *Do I love serving more than I love the people I serve?* At critical points in my (Will's) development as a leader, God has rebuked me through this question, and I have found the same is true for other leaders. As with the other fruits of the Spirit we have discussed—faith, patience, and humility—increasing love takes much time and reflection, as each leader grows in his or her personal relationship with Christ. The following questions are designed to foster reflection as you walk the journey toward genuine concern and love for those you lead.

- Do you spend time with your ministry leaders outside of ministry?
- How often do you pray with or for your leaders?
- What level of intimacy do you experience within your own family?
- What type of atmosphere do you create when you walk into a room?
- Who will attend your funeral without looking at his or her watch?
- How well do you listen to others day in and day out?

As you seek to design and implement a leader-development process, these kinds of questions will rescue you from a “manufacturing perspective.” Leaders are people and they cannot be developed and empowered in an assembly-line fashion. The process is organic and not mechanical—like growing a garden. Strive to cultivate authentic community and genuine concern and you will create rich soil in which leaders can grow and blossom.

### **HEART-BUILDING EXERCISES: SET FOUR**

A practical exercise in building connection with others is to think about how well you know them and then design purposeful interaction to get to know them better. This practice is a very simple way to create bonds with those around you. For example, a new intern came into

my (Will's) office last week. She will probably be around for only three months. Despite the short duration of her ministry season with us, my first two agenda items with this intern are relational, not functional. First, I asked a female colleague to arrange a lunch appointment for the three of us so that I can get to know the intern better. Second, I asked the intern to take a temperament indicator so that I can learn a little about how she is wired. I believe that the front-end investment of building the relationship will set the stage for her to grow and be productive under my leadership.

In designing purposeful interaction to connect with others, use the following list of questions as a guide. (Please keep in mind that some of these questions may not be suitable for opposite-sex interaction in a ministry context.)<sup>14</sup>

- What are the key details of my colleague's heritage?
- What communicates importance and concern to him or her?
- What is his or her personality or temperament?
- What are his or her current practices with spiritual disciplines?
- Who has influenced my colleague's life? How?
- What books or literature has impacted his or her life? How?
- What are his or her areas of disappointment?
- What are the areas of joy?
- What does my colleague aspire to become and do?
- What are his or her fears?
- What are his or her primary temptations?
- What is his or her history with the church?

These questions can serve as a guide for getting to know others. For example, fifteen minutes before meeting with an individual, review this list of questions with the person in mind. Then choose a question or two to ask and thus fill in your knowledge gaps and build the relationship.

The leader's world can be very intense, which often defines his or her conversations with others in a way that limits the dialogue and personal connection. The questions above can thwart self-centered tendencies by helping a "world swap" take place in the leader's mind. That is, they help the leader get out of his or her own world and into the world of the other person. My favorite "world swap" activity is a kind of guessing game. Before meeting with a leader, I will guess the two or three most important subjects bouncing around in that leader's mind at that time. My guesses will be the first points of discussion and interaction. For me,

this simple practice has helped tremendously in building relationships that lead to empowering others.

## **Moses Overcomes the Challenge**

In the introduction we discussed the leadership advice Moses received from his father-in-law in Exodus 18. As a result, Moses took huge steps to empower others in the community of God's people. You will recall that Moses was the primary decision maker for the entire nation. All of that changed when he selected, developed, and empowered several levels of leadership—leaders of ten, fifty, one hundred, and one thousand people.

Imagine, for just a moment, the challenges Moses must have encountered in setting up the system of leadership. With the innumerable unknown outcomes of involving hundreds of other leaders in the decision-making process, Moses could have let the fear of uncertainty cripple him, but he moved forward with faith. Also, he faced a huge “slowing down” window. It was already taking him all day to serve the needs of his weary people. How in the world could he invest the time in training others to lead? But Moses was patient, and he saw the long-term efficiency that would be gained; he saw a better way to serve, and he chose to slow down to speed up.

Moses could have let his ego get in the way. After all, it must feel pretty important to be *the* decision maker for an entire nation! But Scripture tells us that Moses was a humble man, and we see this humility in action through his willingness to empower others.

Finally, Moses could have been unwilling to face the relational demands of connecting with other leaders. But if his relationship with Joshua is any clue, we know that Moses was able to connect with others. Between Exodus 17 and Joshua 22, Joshua and Moses are mentioned in the same verse twenty-seven times. Many of these illustrate directly or imply a close association. Moses, the man who walked in unique intimacy with God, must have walked in unique intimacy with others as well.

The following chart summarizes the challenges of empowerment.

### The Challenges of Empowerment

Empowerment Dynamic	Leader's Inordinate Desire	Empowerment Priority	Area of Heart Building
Empowerment increases the scope of unknown ministry outcomes.	Control	Embrace uncertainty.	Faith
Empowerment requires a sacrifice of short-term ministry efficiency.	Expediency	Slow down to speed up.	Patience
Empowerment requires giving away authority that previously provided the basis of personal ministry success.	Power	Starve your ego.	Humility
Empowerment necessitates close support and authentic community with other leaders.	Isolation	Connect with others.	Love

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In reviewing the definition of empowerment, think through the times you have felt most empowered. Who empowered you and why did you feel empowered?
2. What tendencies do you have when it comes to the alternatives to empowerment—abdicating, directing, and disabling?
3. What specific empowerment dynamic are you facing right now?
4. Review the heart-building exercise for the empowerment dynamic you are currently facing. With whom can you share this material for accountability and continued learning?