

The Leader's Inner Circle

(Building a Healthy Network of Relationships)

“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

BIBLICAL
BASIS

Every leader needs relationships in his or her life that provide the necessary support and accountability. No man is an island. Building a network of relationships with God and people is a wise step to take toward sustaining your leadership over a lifetime.

Leaders Who Failed

A survey was taken among pastors and Christian leaders who had failed morally. Several hundred pastors were interviewed who had compromised their integrity, fallen into sin, and ultimately lost their ministry. Three consistent observations were made about these fallen leaders:

- I had stopped spending time alone with _____ each day.
- I had no accountability to _____ in my life.
- I never thought this kind of _____ could happen to me.

What We All Need

Leaders can avoid pitfalls by establishing and enjoying close relationships with:

- God (your heavenly Father)
- Family (your spouse and children)
- A Paul (a mentor)
- A Barnabas (an accountability partner)
- A Timothy (an apprentice or disciple who follows you)

Why are these relationships especially crucial for a leader?

There are several reasons:

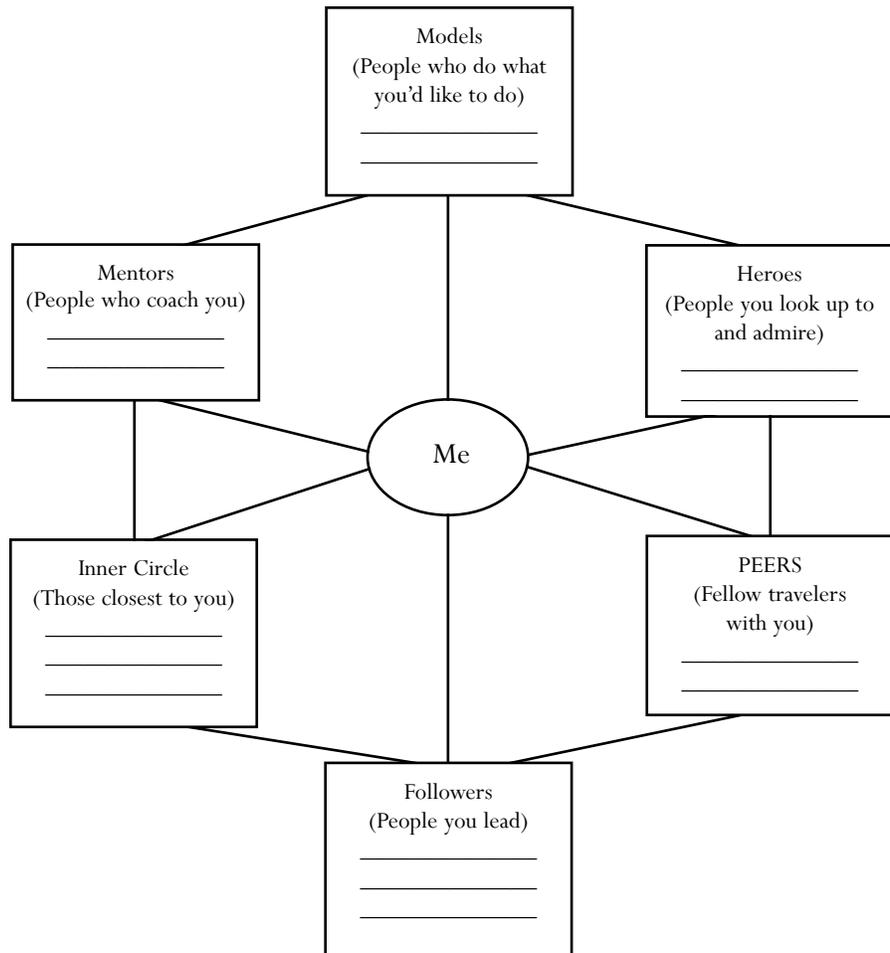
- Every leader has _____.
- Leaders are on the front line of the spiritual battle and are vulnerable to _____.
- Leaders are to set a higher _____ for themselves than their followers.
- Leaders can be “starving bakers” who are busy _____ bread to others, but never eating for themselves.
- Leaders can be _____ to the temptations of power and popularity.
- Leaders can get so _____ that their spiritual life suffers more than anything else.
- Leaders often merely _____ to needs and forget to train others for the future.

Your Network

How about you? Do you experience close, accountable relationships in your life? Take a moment and review the following diagram. Do you have people who fill each role?

KEY POINTS

Write down the names of people who fill each one, then think about whom you might approach for the roles that are empty.



Your Heavenly Father

Although you are a leader, you do not cease being a child of God. The most common term used in the New Testament to describe God is not Creator, King, Ruler, or Savior. It is Father. And you are first His son or daughter before you are a leader. He calls you to lead others, but only as you remain dependent upon Him. This will require conscious steps on your part.

God has established a Kingdom that requires us to receive His love before we are capable of loving the people He has given us to care for. We cannot be grace-givers unless we are first grace-receivers. Listen to the Scripture:

"We love, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

As Christian leaders, we must overcome the temptation to read the Bible simply for sermon preparation. We must first allow God to minister to us as His child. The proper order is given to us in Ezra 7:10: Study it, then practice it, and then teach it to others.

“For Ezra set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes to Israel.” (Ezra 7:10)

Suggestions to Practice the Spiritual Discipline of Time Alone with God:

- a. Make an _____ with God daily.
- b. Begin by becoming _____. Then, ask God to speak specifically to you.
- c. Bring your Bible, a pen and some paper and be prepared to _____ with God.
- d. Develop a _____ for study. Read Scripture that you can digest in one sitting.
- e. Determine to read until you receive a _____ or truth to practice.
- f. _____ out what God is saying through His Word:
 - 1) One Time – Describe what the passage said to the original audience.
 - 2) All Time – Identify a universal principle that is relevant for all time.
 - 3) Now Time – Record what you can do to apply this truth to your life.
- g. Learn to _____ on the specific word God has for you.
- h. _____ through the passage of Scripture asking God to build truth in you.
- i. Internalize the Word through _____.

Your Family

God designed families to be a “refuge” where we can experience intimacy and unconditional love. We are to know and be fully known without fear of rejection. Just as a scientist has a “laboratory” in which he can experiment, families are to be a safe place to practice listening, loving, forgiving, and resolving conflict; all of these prepare us for the unsafe world we enter each day.

In other words, our spiritual leadership and service begins in the home. We serve there first, and then we have credibility to serve outside the home. A good rule to follow is: If it doesn't work at home, don't export it. Listen to Scripture:

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” (1 Timothy 5:8)

Characteristics of Strong Families:

- a. They express _____ for each other on a regular basis.
- b. They structure their lives so they can spend _____ together.
- c. They deal with problems in a _____ way.
- d. They demonstrate a strong _____ to each other.
- e. They continually _____ with one another.
- f. They share the same _____ system.
- g. The parents _____ what it means to bless other members.

KEY POINTS

Finding a Paul

A Paul is a mentor. All leaders ought to have mentors, regardless of how successful they are. Everyone needs a mentor, including mentors. Mentors are people who have traveled further than we have in their leadership journey, and they can pass on what they have learned.

“Counsel in another man's heart is like deep water; but a discerning man will draw it up.”
(Proverbs 20:5)

We recommend you begin each year by writing down four or five areas in which you would like to grow. Then, instead of looking for one perfect mentor to meet all those needs, find a specialist for each one. Mentors are not impossible to find. They are everywhere. If you can't seem to find one, follow these steps:

- a. Pray that God will open your eyes to mentors you may not realize are nearby.
- b. Set a realistic standard. Don't expect a perfect mentor. Mentors are humans, too.
- c. Look for strengths in a potential mentor that you want to develop in yourself.
- d. Be open to multiple mentors who could effectively invest in you.
- e. Recognize that mentors may be distant. Be willing to do it by phone or email.

What to Look for in a Mentor:

In addition to possessing a specific strength, be sure your mentor is:

Godly: They should demonstrate godly character worth imitating.

Objective: They must be able to see your strengths and weaknesses.

Authentic: They must be real. You can see their genuine, transparent heart.

Loyal: They must be loyal to relationships and be able to keep confidentiality.

Serving: They should be willing to give generously of their time and resources.

Finding a Barnabas

A Barnabas is a peer and a friend. They are accountability partners for you. They are important because they motivate us to keep our commitments to God and others. They ask us hard questions about our spiritual life, our motives in ministry, our goals, our character, and our relationships. Finding a Barnabas is like receiving a gift from God. They know us well, and they love us anyway. We don't need to hide anything from them. They motivate us to reach our potential. When you meet with your Barnabas, exchange a list of questions you wish to discuss. Some suggestions might be:

- a. Have you spent time with God on a daily basis?
- b. How have you been tempted this week?
- c. Do you have any unconfessed sin in your life? How is your thought life?
- d. Are your priorities in the right order? Are you reaching your goals?
- e. Have you been completely honest with me in your answers to these questions?

CHECK YOUR
HEART

What to Look for in an Accountability Partner:

Ask accountability partners to make a pact with you. Look for these qualities in them:

Probing: They ask probing questions to help you see needs in your life.

Authentic: They are honest and genuine about their own weaknesses.

Challenging: They help you press on to a new level of leadership and obedience.

Trustworthy: They value honesty and can handle anything you share with them.

“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

“A man of many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” (Proverbs 18:24)

Finding a Timothy

The Bible is clear that leaders are to select and train people for a life of ministry. Jesus selected and trained twelve. Paul found young men like Titus and Timothy. A Timothy is someone who is following you in his or her leadership journey, but is eager to grow as a leader. Every leader ought to find apprentices who learn as they serve alongside the leader. In fact, when they learn, they are also called to pass on what they receive.

“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (II Timothy 2:2)

Leaders should never do ministry alone. They should always be training others as they do the work God has called them to do. A leader's ministry may add to the Kingdom, but when they train a disciple, they multiply for the Kingdom.

ACTION PLAN

What to Look for in a Mentee:

The qualities to look for as you select people to mentor or disciple are these:

Faithful: They are faithful to commitments they have already made.

Available: They have the time to commit to learning from you.

Initiative: They show initiative in their obedience to God and desire to serve.

Teachable: They are willing to learn from you.

Hungry: They have a passion and eagerness to grow as a leader.

Alarm Bells for Leaders

The goal of this network is to help you become a leader of integrity. We need God and people to send us signals when we are failing to live or lead effectively. Often, public buildings have alarm bells that send a signal when something is wrong. The following are questions that should ring as “alarm bells” for leaders:

1. Is my personal walk with _____ up to date?

Are you hearing from God daily? Can others sense you've been in His presence?

2. Am I keeping my _____ straight?

Are you living out what you say is most important to you? Do you schedule priorities?

3. **Am I asking myself the hard _____?**
Why do you do what you do? (Motives) How do you pursue your goals? (Presumption)
4. **Am I _____ to someone in authority?**
Who is your God-given leader to whom you are accountable?
5. **Am I listening to what God is saying to the _____ Body of Christ?**
Do you have a narrow view of God based on your own little world?
6. **Am I over-concerned with building my _____?**
Are you preoccupied with how you look and what others think about you?
7. **Am I overly impressed by either _____ or _____?**
Do you believe everything people say? Are you swayed too much by human opinion?
8. **Am I a “_____” in my ministry?**
Do you tend to be independent, or have you built a network or community around you?
9. **Am I aware of my _____?**
Have you recognized your weaknesses? Do you address them or ignore them?
10. **Is my _____ constantly before me?**
Does your divine calling give you passion each week to serve God?

ASSESSMENT: *How do you give God priority in your daily network?*

ACTION PLAN

Review the diagram for “Your Network.” In which areas do you need to find people with whom you can build key relationships?

APPLICATION: *Identify one person with whom you can be totally honest. This person should be someone with whom you can share your deepest struggles and even discuss your motives. Ask them to meet with you regularly and hold you accountable for your commitments. Who will this be?*

Write down when you will meet to ask them to be part of your network.