CHAPTER ONE

IS GREAT THE ENEMY OF GODLY?

"Good is the enemy of great," according to Jim Collins in the well-known opening line of *Good to Great*.[1] Collins's best-selling book has been a favorite guide for business leaders and has been equally influential for many leaders outside of business, including those in the church.

I am one of those leaders who have been greatly influenced by Collins. Having started my career in business, I readily recognized the relevance of *Good to Great* and similar resources for Christian organizations. But over time, I also realized that leaders in these organizations need to consider another question: "Is great the enemy of godly?"

Before answering this, let me step back and explain Collins's assertion that "good is the enemy of great." Many organizations, after having some measure of success, will declare themselves "good" and may not push themselves to become great. Greatness requires hard work, discipline, and intentionality that are not easily achieved. In corporations, making a profit, releasing a block-buster product, or beating a competitor can lead to satisfaction and complacency.

Far too many churches and Christian enterprises are satisfied with being good. They look at their results at the end of the year and proclaim victory. If they meet their budget or add a few new members or have a couple of ministry highlights, they say this has been a "good" year. In truth, they're saying that this is "good enough." Their standard is doing enough to preserve their comfort and to avoid any dramatic, unsettling changes. It's an

internally derived standard that ignores the reality of a world just outside the doors of the church, a world that is desperate to see and experience God's message of hope. Many books have been written to describe the state of the church and the changes in our world, and it's not my intent to add to that discussion. I simply want to affirm what others have said: if we settle for good results, we will fall far short of the mission to which God has called us, and we will continue to slip toward mediocrity and irrelevance. Good is indeed the enemy of both great and godly.

So is God calling us to greatness? Or is great the enemy of godly? Aspiring to greatness is an interesting dilemma for the church. We can agree with Bill Hybels that the "church is the hope of the world."[2] But we know that "the world"—whether we think of the problems at the local or global level—is terribly broken. This means that the challenge before us is huge. It's a challenge that should stir all of us not to accept the status quo. It's a challenge that should inspire us to give our lives for the sake of God's Kingdom and in doing so to do everything within our power to lead our churches toward greatness.

Or should it? If our mind-set is to do everything *within our power*, does that suggest self-reliance rather than dependence on God? Does it mean that we are building our own kingdoms rather than God's? If we charge toward greatness with blind ambition, is it possible that we will overlook biblical principles in the process? Peter Greer of HOPE International says, "If we're not listening to the Lord, we could run fast, we could jump over tall buildings, and we could be a complete failure in terms of any impact for Christ."[*] If this happens, then great can become the enemy of godly, and the church is no better off being great then being good.

But it is also possible that "godly is the enemy of great." Before you dismiss this statement, consider your experiences around churches and church leaders. Have you ever encountered someone who used a spiritual smoke screen as an excuse for lack of effort or poor results? I am not talking about genuine failures, those times when a well-designed initiative falls short despite prayer and hard work. I am talking about the occasions when leaders take a

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[*]All quotations not credited to published sources are from personal interviews conducted by the author. The subjects of these interviews are identified in detail in Appendix A.

lackadaisical approach, expecting God to make up for their poor planning or minimal effort. It is the adult version of the student who didn't study, prayed as the test was handed out, and expected God to give him recall of facts he never learned. Peter Greer balances his earlier statement, noting that "*nonprofit* should not be a synonym for *nonperforming*."

I believe that great can be the enemy of godly. I also believe that godly can be the enemy of great. And I'm convinced that God wants—in fact, commands—us to lead our churches to be great *and* godly. So how are we to do this?

That is the subject of this book. In particular, we will explore whether and how much we can use the tools and practices and principles of the business world to pursue this twin goal of greatness and godliness. Do we need to learn from secular experts? If so, how can we do so without compromising the call to godliness? Dan Entwistle of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in the Kansas City area, answers that "being a well-run organization is not in direct conflict with being a spiritually vital congregation." While not in direct conflict, the techniques of management can seem very unspiritual. It can be difficult to translate them into spiritual settings. Bishop Janice Huie of the Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church says that "Christian leadership begins and ends with God," but she acknowledges that everything in the middle is where leadership gets complicated. It's that middle space that needs to be addressed.

Straddling the Fence of Sacred-Secular Leadership

My leadership journey began in the business world. After completing my M.B.A., I went to work for McKinsey & Company, one of the largest and most prominent strategy consulting companies in the world. It was a tremendous experience in which I learned a great deal about strategy, organizational design, change management, leadership, and many other subjects. After several years at McKinsey, I knew that it was time to make some sort of change but was unsure where that might lead.

At the same time, my good friend Jim Herrington had just been chosen as the new leader of Union Baptist Association (UBA), the

Houston-area judicatory body for Southern Baptists and the largest local Baptist association in the country. Over the next several years, I remained firmly planted in the business arena (in several different jobs) but also began to work with Jim and the great team at UBA and then with other Christian organizations, helping congregations apply the many business principles I had learned. My first book, *Leading Congregational Change* (written with Jim Herrington and James Furr), was an outgrowth of this work. The response to the book and the seminars we led confirmed the benefit of using business principles in the church.

One of my favorite business resources was *Built to Last* by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras.[3] I found the concept of "preserve the core and stimulate progress" to be a powerful tool for stimulating discussions about corporate and congregational leadership. So in 2000, when I learned that Collins would be one of the keynote speakers at a Leadership Network event, I eagerly anticipated hearing him describe his latest research.

One topic that he spent a considerable amount of time talking about was the importance of getting "the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus." Collins's research, which was the basis for *Good to Great*, showed that strategic direction was secondary to getting the right leadership team. He concluded that executives should focus on senior staff as a top priority. If you have the right people, they will help define the future direction of the organization. If they are in the wrong positions but fit the culture and have great potential, you can move them to a "different seat on the bus." But when someone is wrong for the organization, whether due to lack of ability or personality clashes, retaining them can drag the entire enterprise down.[4]

I remember nodding my head in agreement as I heard this. Even though my primary employment was in the marketplace at the time, a growing amount of my time was spent as a consultant to churches and speaker on congregational leadership. I knew the tendency of many churches to make excuses rather than confront underperforming staff members. I remember thinking, "Wouldn't the church be much more effective and be able to achieve far more for the Kingdom if we got the wrong people off the bus?"

Little did I know that within a year I would leave my corporate career to serve in a vocational ministry role on a church staff and

would begin to have first-hand opportunities to test this and other business principles in a congregational setting. And little did I appreciate some of the differences and challenges that I would encounter.

My wife knew how much I was anticipating the publication of *Good to Great*, and when I came home on the date of release in 2001, I found a copy waiting on my desk. I devoured it. But around the same time, I read another book that stood in stark contrast to my business reading. Our senior pastor kept talking about *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* by Jim Cymbala, so I picked up a copy in an effort to expand my reading beyond the business sector.

It's hard to get whiplash from reading a book, but that is how it felt as I pored over the powerful story of Brooklyn Tabernacle. The whiplash did not come from the congregation's success but from the simple, faith-filled approach that Cymbala described. He seemed to run from everything that gave a hint of the leadership methods of corporate America, saying things like "We don't need technicians and church programmers; *we need God.* He is not looking for smart people, because he's the smart one. All he wants are people simple enough to trust him."[5]

I wished that I could dismiss Cymbala, but as I turned the last page of his book, I was forced to face a pivotal question: What does it mean to be an effective, biblical leader in a local congregation? It was no longer enough for me to say, "My leadership gift has been shaped in the marketplace, and now God wants me to use this gift in ministry." I needed to take a fresh look at leadership in the local church.

Over the past ten years, the journey of exploration and discovery has continued for me. On the one hand, I have learned to recognize some of the limitations and downsides of my business-oriented bias. I have learned a great deal from Spirit-led pastors and lay leaders who have helped me listen more closely to God and not rely exclusively on analysis. On the other hand, I have seen our church change and thrive over this decade, and I believe that the mix of gifts that God has assembled, including my business skills, have been key ingredients in our success. Beyond my own church, I have encountered many spiritual leaders who have been asking the same question that I've been asking: What is the most effective and God-honoring way to lead our faith-based organizations?

A Biblical Foundation

If we want to honor God with our leadership, then it is appropriate to start with God's Word. What does the Bible teach us about leadership? In one sense, it teaches us a great deal. The Bible gives us many different images of great leaders and what they accomplish. It also gives us vivid portrayals of leadership failures, both by people who love God (think of David and Bathsheba) and by people who oppose God (think of Pharaoh and the Exodus story). It gives timeless principles that can benefit any leader.

We need to glean as much as possible from Scripture about leadership, but in doing so we should recognize that we will discover general principles far more often than specific practices. In fact, if we search the pages of the Bible for an example of how to handle a difficult problem, we might come up with some strange answers. Would any of us really conclude that God wants us to kill (literally) a former ally who had some ruthless, power-grabbing tendencies? Yet we find this in David's final instruction to Solomon regarding Joab. Of course, that is an extreme example, but there are plenty of other stories that may not point us in the right direction for our particular situation.

Ultimately, leadership in Christian organizations is about getting a group of people to discern a God-given direction and commit their lives to accomplish this purpose. Whether that purpose is building a temple, opposing unjust and unbiblical laws, or organizing and discipling a growing body of new believers, leadership stories flow throughout the pages of Scripture. What are the core principles of biblical leadership? For me, there are a handful that transcend individual stories and that are relevant for every Christian leader.

God's purpose is unchanging and nonnegotiable. The metanarrative of the Bible is God's love for humanity and the story of redemption. Christian organizations must align their priorities around the gospel. Leaders may emphasize certain aspects of this purpose in their organization's mission, but they must not create a vision that is disconnected from God's plan.

God chooses to work through human leaders. As flawed and imperfect as we are, God consistently chooses to use men and women with the gift of leadership to organize and mobilize large groups to accomplish His purposes. When we see leaders fail, we may

wonder if there is some other way, but this is the way that God has chosen. Until Christ returns, the church will continue to be God's instrument for carrying out the Great Commission, and human beings will be called on to provide the leadership.

Biblical leadership cannot be boiled down to a single model. Whenever someone offers a definitive model of biblical leadership, I quickly dismiss it. Is biblical leadership top-down or collaborative? It can be either—look at Moses leading the people out of Egypt compared to James in the council of Jerusalem. Are godly leaders intuitive and impulsive, or are they deliberate and thoughtful? Again, the answer is either—just compare Peter to Paul. Leaders in Scripture fit a wide variety of profiles that reflect their specific contexts and their unique personalities. The only absolute is that biblical leadership is obedient to God and brings glory to Him. This means that we should be cautious before pronouncing any model or style of leadership as *the* biblical model.

Effective leadership is grounded in healthy relationships. Relationships are the currency of leadership, especially in the church, and the Bible has plenty of instruction on relationships that every leader should heed. Not every biblical leader is a model of relational health, but we see plenty of examples (Joseph forgiving his brothers, David caring for his men while on the run, Paul mentoring Timothy). More than that, the New Testament is full of guidance on how people should relate: do unto others, in humility consider others better than yourself, speak the truth in love. When the relationship between leader and followers is based on trust and integrity and placing God first, great things can happen.

God-honoring leadership is often a hard, lonely journey. In our society, leadership is glamorized. The top business and political leaders are the ones on the covers of magazines. Leaders in Scripture may seem larger than life at times, but they are also burdened, alone, and rejected in many cases. Look at the pain David expresses in some of the Psalms, Paul's anguish for the people in the churches he planted, or the rejection Moses experienced. No one should begin the journey of Christian leadership expecting it to be a bed of roses.

A leader's character and spiritual health are of utmost importance to God. Which do you think matters most to God, the growth in your church's average worship attendance this year or the growth of your soul? The kingdom of Israel was bigger and more prosperous

under Solomon, but David was Israel's greatest and most revered king because of his heart for God. That is God's desire for each of us—that we are increasingly shaped into His image. When that happens, our leadership will flow out of lives that are surrendered to Him, and the organizational results will follow in God's time.

This list of principles is not exhaustive. Perhaps you have thought of others to add to your list of key leadership principles in Scripture. Regardless of what you end up with, we should be able to agree on two things: the Bible lays the foundation for leadership, but it is not a comprehensive guide for every leadership need. It is this second truth that leads us to the arena of business leadership practices.

BUSINESS THINKING IS NOT THE ENEMY

When we refer to "business thinking" or "corporate practices," what do we mean? More important, what mental images are stirred up by this terminology? Many people—church leaders and average citizens—have a decidedly negative image of "corporate America." They think of unbridled greed and oversized executive egos. They are aware of the huge disparity between the compensation of top executives and workers on the bottom rungs of the ladder. They know of cases where companies have bent the rules as far as possible to make a little more profit. This thinking is not unjustified—over the past two decades, we have seen a steady stream of headlines that paint this picture of "business."

Does that mean that all businesses are bad? Are corporations and any leadership ideas that emerge from them inherently evil? Before you answer, consider that over those same twenty years, we have also seen a steady stream of unflattering headlines about churches and church leaders. Churches have split in acrimonious debates, funds have been used to build earthly kingdoms and line the pockets of leaders, and prominent pastors have left the ministry after dramatic moral failures. These stories have caused some in the unchurched world to see Christianity as a sham. Do these failures mean that everything done by the church in America is fundamentally bad?

As Christians, our response is a resounding no and a vigorous defense of the church. You might say, "These are just a handful

of the many congregations in the country, and they're giving a bad name to all the good, godly work being done in the name of Christ." And you would be exactly right. Perhaps we should think of business the same way: there are some bad apples, but we shouldn't conclude that business thinking is the antithesis of Christian leadership. Instead, we should examine more closely what business might offer to our churches.

NOT ALL BUSINESS PRINCIPLES ARE APPLICABLE

An easy starting point is to acknowledge that some business principles are not applicable for leadership in the church. Some of the methodologies that spur corporate success are either contrary to the teachings of Scripture or simply don't fit with an orthodox understanding of the purpose of the church. For example, some business practices are based on manipulation—convincing potential customers to buy a product that they don't really need or coercing employees to do something that they don't want to do. Manipulating people is clearly not appropriate conduct for Christian leaders. Another widely accepted business mantra is "the customer is always right." While it is important to know and listen to our members and potential members, the church is not a consumer goods company whose goal is to develop products to please its "customers."

Scott Cormode of Fuller Theological Seminary uses a variety of secular resources in his leadership classes. In evaluating whether material is appropriate, he looks at the underlying motive that is espoused. If the author's end goal is profit or personal advancement for the reader, Cormode steers away from it. Such resources may have great nuggets of leadership wisdom to offer, but their basis may be out of line with our purposes in Christian organizations. When in doubt, biblical principles should trump "best practices."

SCRIPTURE IS FULL OF "BUSINESS PRINCIPLES"

I would never suggest that the Bible is a business book. The purpose of Scripture is to teach people about God and point them toward God. It is to communicate God's love for humanity and to

offer God's grace to all who will receive it. It is to tell the story of God working in history to redeem His creation.

Within that story, however, we see a surprising number of principles that are applicable for leading any kind of enterprise, whether a corporation, a church, a university, or a governmental agency. A handful of these biblical leadership precepts illustrate the point:

- In Exodus 18, Moses is visited by his father-in-law, Jethro, who recognizes that Moses' "span of command" has gotten too large and is unsustainable. He wisely advises Moses to reorganize the people by appointing second-tier leaders to handle the minor issues so that only the major ones are brought to Moses' attention. It is a classic principle for organizing any growing enterprise.
- The book of Nehemiah is a great picture of a leader who is gripped with a compelling vision, communicates it to the people, and then implements a specific plan to see the vision realized.
- In Acts 6, the early church appoints seven men to oversee the distribution of food so that the apostles can focus on "prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). This passage shows the importance of selecting the right people (making good hiring decisions), putting people into roles that fit their strengths, and organizing a group to accomplish a desired goal.

Of course, plenty of biblical examples are completely contrary to any kind of business logic. Think of Gideon dismissing almost all of his army before going into battle, Joshua marching around Jericho, or Jesus' hard teaching that caused many to turn away. I don't expect corporate executives to throw out all their business books and rely exclusively on the Bible for guiding their companies, but I am not surprised when they find practical wisdom in Scripture.

Business Is Full of Scriptural Principles

If a new concept for leadership emerges in a business leadership book, does that mean that the author is the discoverer? Or is it

possible that the core of the concept has much older, deeper roots? In the scientific realm, the breakthrough that wins a Nobel Prize for one person is almost always built on the work of others. The same can be said for some of the well-known leadership concepts from the business world. They are built on or have grown out of biblical origins.

Consider one of the significant findings in Collins's research for *Good to Great*: the Level 5 leader. Collins and his team discovered that the "good to great" companies were not led by larger-than-life, ego-driven CEOs. While this may be the exact image that comes to mind when you think of successful corporate executives, Collins describes this model as a "Level 4" leader. The great companies had Level 5 leaders at the helm. According to Collins, a Level 5 leader is "an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will."[6] Is this a new insight from the world of business? The "Level 5" terminology is new, but the description fits the best leaders in Scripture. It is what we see in Christ modeling servant leadership but never losing sight of his mission. It is Paul's missionary zeal while at the same time confessing that he is the worst of sinners, unworthy of God's mercy (1 Timothy 1:13–14).

Or consider this finding from *The Leadership Challenge* by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner: "Exemplary leaders have a passion for something other than their own fame and fortune. They care about making a difference in the world."[7] Isn't this exactly what has always been modeled by great Christian leaders whose passion is not self-directed but is focused on glorifying God and advancing His Kingdom?

The point is that we must not discard a leadership concept just because it is presented as having a secular source. An article in *Forbes*, a flagship magazine in the business community, states, "Many CEOs try to improve their leadership through precepts that ultimately have a biblical bias."[8] Or to quote King Solomon: "There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time" (Ecclesiastes 1:9–10). Many of the leadership debates and solutions that we think are unique to our generation are far older than we ever imagined.

An Organism *and* an Organization

One of the long-running debates is whether the church is an organism or an organization. In recent years, the rise of house churches, organic churches, and cell groups has heightened the issue. Those who say it's an organism focus on the spontaneous, unpredictable movement of God. They argue against planning, against reliance on human techniques and tools, and against being too structured. Advocates for organization focus on the wasted energy and resources that occur when plans are lacking. They believe that any church larger than a cell needs to have order and structure. Rather than taking sides, the better question is whether a church can be both.

Chris Hodges, senior pastor of Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama, says, "The church is an organism, not an organization. It's the living, breathing body of Christ." But Hodges knows the need to lead with both in mind. He continues, "There is a corporate side to it [the church]. If you turn it into a business, that turns people away; but if it's not run well, like a business, that turns people away as much." Hodges is right. If we squeeze the Spirit of God out of a congregation by becoming overly structured, it's no longer a church.

Every effective leader must balance between the crippling chaos of too little organization and the stifling rigidity of too much. Dan Reiland, executive pastor of 12Stone Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, addressed this subject in a leadership lesson that he titled "How Do You Lead with Your Heart on Fire When It Feels like Your Hair Is on Fire?" We all want leaders who are passionate, whose hearts are on fire, and who encourage that passion in others. What keeps them from being able to do that? Any number of factors can squelch that passion, but one of the most frequent is the continual firefighting that comes from lack of structure. Paul instructed the church in Corinth to be orderly in worship, so isn't it reasonable that God wants everything in our churches to "be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40)?

For people to get connected, be discipled, and plug into areas that use their gifts and passions, a certain level of infrastructure and process—in other words, organization—is necessary. Perhaps the problem is that the word *organization* has negative connotations. If organization means "rigid" and "rule-oriented" and "resistant

to change," we should run from any hint of it. These are actually characteristics of a bureaucracy, not a thriving entity. In truth, the best companies do not function like this. Collins and Porras found that visionary companies have a "drive for progress" that "is never satisfied with the status quo, *even when the status quo is working well.*"[9] When policies trump purpose, as happens far too often in churches, the result is self-preserving institutionalism, not organization.

If an organization is not a spiritless, inflexible bureaucracy, what is it? What benefits come from being an organization? It is the power of bringing large numbers of people together to work for a greater purpose. God used Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge in incredible ways after Hurricane Katrina. The church, a major hub in a local network called the Pastors Resource Council, served more than one hundred thousand meals, offered temporary lodging to three hundred people for a month, housed a full-service medical clinic, and distributed literally tons of clothing and other necessities to those whose lives were devastated by the storm.[10] Mobilizing thousands of volunteers to do this would not have been possible had the church not functioned as an organization. Its extravagant response would not have been possible had the church not been operating as an organic body led by the Spirit. Organism and organization can work together.

A False Dichotomy

In my interviews with Christian leaders, I asked how they reconciled the use of corporate principles in their settings. By far the most frequent answer I heard was "All truth is God's truth." In other words, if a leadership principle is valid and true, it doesn't matter who made the statement because God is the ultimate source of all truth and wisdom.

But what does this mean? Greg Holder, lead pastor of The Crossing in the Saint Louis area, says, "We're not afraid of truth because we know who stands behind all truth. The sacred-secular line, which in some ways goes back to the Middle Ages, is not something we operate under." Holder makes it clear that he and his colleagues don't just "cut and paste" anyone's practices—from business or other churches—into their church, but they're not

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afraid to adapt any "truth" that they uncover. Judy West, who serves alongside Holder at The Crossing, notes that the staff read Kirk Kazanjian's *Exceeding Customer Expectations* to learn more about hospitality. This book about the history of Enterprise Rent-A-Car provides some powerful lessons about care of the customer. But West is quick to add that The Crossing's interpretation of "care" does not mean "the customer is always right." She points out that a business might tolerate an angry customer who is mouthing off, but the church has an obligation to correct inappropriate behavior.

Rodney Cooper of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary proposes that the use of secular leadership concepts is a form of "spoiling the Egyptians."[11] The Hebrew people were instructed to "spoil the Egyptians"—take their gold and jewelry—as they began their exodus. God allowed them to take something of value from ungodly people, and He ultimately used it for a sacred purpose—building the tabernacle. In the same way, Cooper says we should take the best of business and apply it to benefit our churches and glorify God.

Jim Leggett of Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church in Katy, Texas, expands on this by saying, "All truth is God's truth, but the best business practices will only produce 'human temple' results without dependence on God's Spirit. Eternal fruit is not going to happen apart from God's Spirit, even if we're using best business practices." Leggett alludes to the biblical teaching that it is vain to build anything apart from God (Psalm 127:1), yet that is exactly what can happen when leadership principles are adopted without a spiritual context. Christian leaders must guard against using secular leadership resources to make a "golden calf" rather than a God-honoring temple.

Even though Jim Collins is identified as a business expert, he believes that great leadership principles transcend the corporate arena. After the runaway success of *Good to Great*, Collins received many requests to address the "social sectors" (governmental entities, schools, nonprofit organizations, churches, and the like), organizations that do not have profit as their bottom-line motivation. In *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, he states, "We must reject the idea—well-intentioned, but dead wrong—that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become 'more

like a business.' . . . We need to reject the naïve imposition of the 'language of business' on the social sectors, and instead jointly embrace a *language of greatness*."[12] So how can we embrace a "language of greatness" in the church in a God-honoring way?

Jim Mellado, president of the Willow Creek Association, simply says, "We don't dichotomize business practices versus spiritual practices." He describes the first time that a case study on Willow Creek Community Church was taught at Harvard Business School, a story that is also told in Bill Hybels's book *Courageous Leadership*. Mellado and Hybels were both in the class that day, and as Hybels notes, "One of the students raised his hand and challenged me. 'Bill, I just don't think you should mix best management practices with spiritual stuff. I'm really uneasy with all this leadership training, leadership development, and managing for results that I see at Willow.'" Hybels, who grew up around his father's business and has always been a student of leadership best practices, responded:

> What you have to understand is that some of us church leaders believe to the core of our beings that the local church is the hope of the world. . . . That's why we are so determined to get our visions right and live out our values and come up with effective strategies. We truly believe that it matters that we attain our goals. It matters that we align our staffs and leverage our resources. We believe that the success or failure of our churches directly affects people's lives here today and for eternity. . . . That's why we make no apology for learning and applying best practice principles as God leads us in our churches.[13]

ADAPT, NOT ADOPT

As we consider the practices of greatness that we find in business, a simple rule of thumb is to *adapt*, not adopt. We should not adopt these practices wholesale, as they are applied in the corporate world, but instead should adapt them, based on our understanding of Scripture and the unique contexts of our Christian organizations. Of course, this guidance is true for great ideas that we find even in other Christian organizations. A novel ministry may have been very effective in one church, but that doesn't mean it is right for yours. Many churches endure the "program of the month" drill when their pastors bring back the latest new idea from

a conference. Dino Rizzo, senior pastor of Healing Place Church, likes to say, "One person's plan is another person's poison."

Adapting rather than adopting is easier said than done. Bishop Andy Doyle of the Diocese of Texas (Episcopal) believes that too many churches "look for the silver bullet" in business tools without understanding how to apply them effectively. Many pastors and Christian ministry leaders have little, if any, training or experience in business or organizational leadership. As a result, they struggle with knowing which business concepts to use and how to put them into practice. The corporate leaders in these same ministries understand the business use of the tool but lack an appreciation for the nuances of church life. If these two groups are unable to work together, they miss the opportunity to strengthen the congregation.

One pastor invited a retired corporate CEO to help rethink the church's staff development systems. The pastor was concerned that the best-performing staff members were not being adequately recognized, so the CEO developed a corporate-style bonus plan. Once the pastor saw the plan, he realized that a system based on financial rewards would not work in the environment of his church, so he abandoned it. He decided that receiving affirmation and playing an important role in a thriving church were the best ways to motivate the staff.

Leading Upside Down

The key to adapting rather than adopting is to run secular leadership concepts through a biblical filter. I rise early in the mornings and make the first pot of coffee in our house. The filter is an essential part of the process. When I put it in the basket correctly, I get a nice cup of coffee. Every once in a while, the filter gets folded over and I get a pot full of grounds. In either instance, the pot looks and smells the same from a distance; but in the latter case, if I actually take a sip, it's gross!

Any leadership or organizational concept that we consider bringing into our churches and Christian entities should be filtered through Scripture. Some ideas may be contrary to our interpretation of God's Word, in which case we should throw them out, no matter how well they work elsewhere. Some, as described earlier, may actually have a basis in Scripture, in which case we

have a good starting point for adapting and applying them. And many will fall somewhere in between.

For those in-between cases, it is important to remember that the way we see the world and the things that drive us should be fundamentally different than in business. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard tells the story of a fighter jet pilot who "turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent—and flew straight into the ground. She was unaware that she had been flying upside down."[14] Willard returns to this image later when he reminds us of a core truth of Christianity: "What is truly profound is thought to be stupid or trivial, or worse, boring, while what is actually stupid and trivial is thought to be profound. That is what it means to fly upside down."[15] Greg Surratt, senior pastor of Seacoast Church in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, echoes this theme when he says, "There is obviously a fundamental difference in the prevailing philosophy of the world than there is in the church." Surratt notes that Jesus' teaching on leadership and servanthood—"whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26)—is "upside down from the world."

This is just one area where the underlying mind-set of business is upside down from Scripture. Business thinking is dominated by the profit motive, the drive to make more money and earn a larger return for shareholders. Business thinking assumes that people are self-serving, and it works from a self-deterministic belief that individuals must seize the initiative for their career success. This thinking ignores the possibility that God might be at work or that we should seek His will for our lives.

Some secular leadership resources, while very helpful at one level, run counter to a Christian worldview in subtle but significant ways. *The Leadership Challenge* is a great book, full of solid concepts for any leader. In describing the first of five practices for exemplary leaders, Kouzes and Posner emphasize the importance of knowing your own values: "You must know what you care about. . . . If you don't burn with desire to be true to something you hold passionately, how can you expect commitment from others? And until you get close enough to the flame to feel the heat, how can you know the source?"[16]

From a Christian perspective, that sounds like solid leadership advice. We would identify the source of the heat as God, something that Kouzes and Posner don't acknowledge. They don't

prescribe what we should care about, whereas a Christian would say that Scripture gives clear direction on this. Still, it sounds like good advice.

In the same section, however, the authors conclude, "We are much more in control of our own lives . . . when we're clear about our personal values."[17] That is where I take exception. I don't think I am in control of my life, and I don't think the Bible says that I should be. If my purpose in clarifying my values is to have better control of my life, I am working against God, who calls me to fully surrender to Him.

This simple example illustrates the subtle challenge in adapting secular leadership principles. These principles, to some degree, turn leaders toward a way of life that is upside down from God's ways. Even if you personally have a solid foundation, there are plenty of other leaders on your board, in key volunteer roles, or serving alongside you who spend (or have spent) much of their lives in the corporate arena. They soak up these great (and sometimes ungodly) ideas every day and then bring them into the church. Their intentions are good, and they genuinely want the church to succeed, but they fail to see the pitfalls of their recommendations. Discovering a common leadership language and approach for Christian organizations is a theme that runs throughout this book and is addressed explicitly in Chapter Nine.

That brings us to one last upside-down mind-set that can undermine Christian leaders: the drive for success. Our society is consumed with success. It is what makes athletes take performance-enhancing drugs to gain an edge. It is what leads "nice" businesspeople to cut ethical corners to beat a competitor. It is what causes some pastors to ignore their families and lose sight of God "for the sake of the church." God wants and deserves our very best. He wants our churches to be "successful," but there is a point at which our pursuit of success is not a pursuit of God. In fact, the drive for ministry success can ultimately run counter to God's desires. Jim Mellado observes that many ministry leaders focus on skill development more than character development. As their leadership skills improve and their ministries grow, the spiritual dimension—becoming more like Christ—fails to keep pace. Mellado concludes, "Great skills [and] more ministry, but flawed character, leads to a crash."[18]

Our congregations need excellent leadership, but every Christian leader should wrestle with what it means to be "excellent." Greg Matte, senior pastor of Houston's First Baptist Church, believes that many of his peers may have "gone too far with [the use of business tools]. They'd rather be seen as great leaders than great theologians." Matte was a business major in college and is an avid student of secular leadership material, but he explains that he sees a theologian as someone who is "learning and leading from a place of spiritual depth. Leadership is by all means important, but at the end of the day, God didn't call me to be a 'C.E.O. for G.O.D.' but to minister to people through leading and loving. Good old Psalm 78:72 ['And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them']."

Therein lies the dilemma for any leader in a Christian organization, whether it is big or small, new or well established, church or parachurch. We are to lead with integrity of heart and with skillful hands. We are to lead from a place of spiritual depth and to lead with all diligence for the glory of God. We are to lead toward greatness *and* godliness.

WHAT ARE YOU PURSUING?

- Describe your philosophy for using secular leadership principles in Christian organizations. What is the basis for your philosophy? Who or what (people, models, reading) have influenced you most in this regard?
- Sit down with someone who has a different background or philosophy from yours. Discuss your differing perspectives. Discuss specific leadership situations and how each of you would handle them.
- What would you add or change in the list of core principles of biblical leadership in "A Biblical Foundation" in Chapter One?
- Over the next week, listen for a secular leadership concept, and consider whether you agree with it. Do you or don't you? Can you explain why? How might it be adapted to fit your organization?
- If Christian leadership should be upside down from secular leadership, which way are you pointed? Head up? Head down? Somewhere in between?