

The Secure Leader

Posted by admin

I have struggled for years with a serious problem that has been the undoing of many leaders. It often lies below the surface but slowly rises to the top when a leader gains power or is given increased responsibility. It has been the achille's heel of many leaders in the church, the business world and in the world of athletics.

I am speaking of insecurity. It is the "silent killer" of ministry effectiveness and longevity because the insecure leader might not see the evidences of his/her insecurity until it is too late. Over the last five years or so the Lord has allowed me to experience an increasing degree of joy and contentment in whom He made me and is increasingly delivering me from competing and comparing with others to (in a sick and harmful way) find out where I am in the "pecking order."

The purpose of this issue is not to delve into a detailed Biblical and theological exploration of security in Jesus Christ, but more to share a bit of my own thinking and journey in the hope that it would be helpful to fellow leaders.

I did not get off to a good start in life. I lived in a home where there was not a lot of love or affection and struggled early in life with not feeling good about myself. As a result I did not do well in school and was very withdrawn, shy and inhibited. I was prone to take criticism of any kind very personally and it would often devastate me for weeks or months on end. I was extremely fearful of what people might say about me or think about me and fell into the trap of doing really stupid things to be liked or appreciated.

When I was twenty, Jesus Christ became the center of my life and birthed in me a sense of belonging and security; at least in theory. But it has taken me 30 years or so for that to sink down to a deep level and enable me to not be overly obsessed with myself and other people's perception of me; to get to that frame of mind where I can hear criticism or have people strongly disagree with me and not have it affect me in a negative way.

In the first 20 years of my ministry experience, I often said or did things in order to get my leaders to appreciate or accept me. Often, it bordered on dishonesty or manipulation of those I led in order to produce better results.

I was not very teachable and not open to the thoughts of others or flexible and willing to change my thinking or ideas because of my fears and insecurities. Sad to say, I hurt and used a lot of people I should have been encouraging and pasturing as their leader. I am deeply regretful of that.

One verse in the NIV has been a close friend and companion for quite a few years and first set my mind to thinking.

“Moreover, when God gives any man wealth or possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, accept his lot and be happy in his work, this is a gift of God.” Ecclesiastes 5:19

I now consider my “personal design” as a possession that God has allowed me to have. This verse is clearly telling me that I need, by His grace, to enjoy rather than endure what God has made, accept my lot and state in life and be happy in the work (my ministry) He has allowed me to have. But I, on the other hand, for many years, was not enjoying who I was, not able to gratefully accept my lot and certainly was not happy with both the nature of what I was doing or the results from what I was doing. In short, I was not a happy camper and was constantly comparing with other leaders whom I perceived were doing better or were better.

Two years ago, I came across John 5:41 in the New Living Translation, where Jesus is speaking to some of the Jewish leaders, “Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me...” I then and there deeply understood that people’s approval or disapproval of me had dominated my life and enslaved me for far too long and there needed to be a change. My journey away from insecurity, comparing, completing and discontent continued forward.

Here a few passages from The Message I am memorizing and meditating on and which are having a profound and lasting impact on my security and contentment in Jesus. “Isn’t everything you have and everything you are sheer gifts from God? So what’s the point of all this comparing and competing?”

–I Corinthians 4:7

Everything I am by way of design and everything I have by way of gifts, and results are God’s sheer gifts to me. If I really, truly, deeply believed that, there would be no need to compare or compete in order to feel good about who I am.

“Let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be somebody we aren’t “

–Romans 12:4,5

I want to be consistently delivered from trying to be somebody I’m not and thankfully accept and live out who I am

“Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don’t be impressed with yourself. Don’t compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life.”

–Galatians 6:4

God has made me who I am and given me work to do that reflects who He has made me. I neither want to be self-observed or compare, but get on with sinking myself into what He has called me to be and do

“Don’t love the world’s ways. Don’t love the world’s goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from Him. The world in all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity.”

–I John 2:15,16

The phrase in this passage that hit home was, “wanting to appear important.” It continues to hit me hard every time I review it. I honestly ask myself, what have I been doing to “appear important” and why am I continuing to do this? What drives and motivates me to do what I do in my leadership role? Is it love for God and people, or love for power, position or popularity? Difficult questions for me to ask, but essential to maintain purity of motive before Jesus.

Recently I was offered a new responsibility that I had been thinking about and praying about for quite a few years. I told the person offering it that needed a few weeks to check my motives. Why did I want this responsibility? What was driving and motivating me? I needed to do some deep heart searching before accepting. I am not sure if he understood the need to wait, but given my past I certainly did.

So there it is. A bit of my journey from abject insecurity to one who is experiencing increasing joy and contentment in serving Jesus with purity of heart and motives and not consumed with where others are, what they are doing, the success they are having, or what they may or may not think of me. I’m not what I want to be, not what I should be and not what I will be, but thank Jesus I’m not what I was!