

MAKE IT COUNT

A ten-week study for leadership teams by *Influence* magazine

Guarding Your Heart in Leadership

By STEPHEN BLANDINO



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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A 10-Week Study For Leadership Teams



What Is Make It Count?

Make It Count is a leadership development resource for use individually or with staff, volunteers, or board members.

Each installment is also available online as a downloadable PDF, along with interactive pages for group member use. The underlined words and phrases in the following text correspond to fill-in-the-blank sections on team member pages. Access these free resources at influencemagazine.com/Downloads.

These lessons are written by Stephen Blandino, lead pastor of 7 City Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and the author of several books.



INTRODUCTION

Guarding Your Heart in Leadership

By **STEPHEN BLANDINO**

Leadership is an emotional minefield. One day you feel on top of the world, and the next you feel like throwing in the towel. It's a constant tug-of-war between faith and fear, humility and pride, offense and forgiveness, and guilt and grace.

Add to the emotions of leadership the various vices that aim to take us out — things like pride, cynicism and insecurities. All of these converge as enemies of the heart, and they have the power to undermine our life and leadership.



The question is, how do you overcome these enemies that war within you? This edition of *Make It Count* explores 10 common issues of the heart, and how leaders can successfully guard their hearts against each one.

1. *Insecurity: Leading When You Feel Unqualified.* We all experience some measure of insecurity, but when we find ourselves lacking, Christ is our source of security.
2. *Jealousy: Leading When Others Are Succeeding.* King Saul kept a jealous eye on David after the young man's victory over Goliath. As leaders, we may be tempted to respond the same way when others succeed. Instead, we should give thanks and celebrate.

3. *Anger: Leading When You're Mad.* Sometimes people do things that spark a flame of anger inside us. However, the apostle Paul gives us a recipe to defeat our anger by being kind, compassionate and forgiving.
4. *Pride: Leading When You Want the Credit.* Jesus repeatedly warned of the dangers from pride. To defeat this deadly sin, we have to practice the Golden Rule, ask more questions, share the credit, and get in the trenches.
5. *Burnout: Leading When You're Exhausted.* Leadership is relentless, and burnout is a very real culprit that's taken out countless leaders. Thankfully, there are practical steps we can take to live and lead at a sustainable pace.
6. *Offense: Leading When You're Wounded.* Leadership is not for the faint of heart, and if we don't protect our hearts, we'll personalize the wounds that come our way. We have to simultaneously develop soft hearts and thick skin.
7. *Cynicism: Leading When You've Lost Hope.* Cynicism can quickly settle in when we become jaded by the pain of leadership. The key is to remain hopeful in the midst of hardship so we can finish well in life and in leadership.
8. *Guilt: Leading When You Need Grace.* Leaders live under a microscope. Everyone has an opinion about what we do wrong and how we could do better. Thankfully, God invites us to lead out of grace rather than guilt.
9. *Fear: Leading When You're Scared.* Fear and leadership go hand in hand, because leaders chart the way into new territory. Like Joshua, we can trust in God's promises rather than letting fear paralyze us.
10. *Worry: Leading When You're Uncertain.* Leaders dwell in the land of uncertainty. There is always something to worry about, but worship helps us reframe our perspective.
As you discuss these 10 lessons with your team, you'll learn how to navigate common challenges and guard your heart in the process.

GUARDING YOUR HEART IN LEADERSHIP

1 Insecurity: Leading When You Feel Unqualified

Assess

When has insecurity gotten the best of you as a leader?

Insights and Ideas

We all experience some measure of insecurity in leadership and in ministry. Moses certainly did when God commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. Moses asked, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11).

Moses’ insecurities led to feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and insignificance. And the same can happen to us today. Insecurity can creep into any area of life. Common signs of insecurity include defensiveness, micromanagement, the inability to receive feedback, a lack of healthy confidence, and an unwillingness to share the credit or develop other leaders.

There is no age limit to insecurity. In fact, insecurity often increases as we experience more success and greater levels of responsibility.

How can you guard your heart against insecurity? Here are three ways:

1. *Anchor your identity in Christ.* Insecurities often stem from self-worth issues. Remember, on your best day and on your worst day, God loves you the same. Before Jesus ever performed a single miracle, His Heavenly Father said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). God loves you and is pleased with you, regardless of what kind of success you have in leadership.
2. *Avoid the comparison trap.* Comparison often leads to one of two extremes: jealousy or pride. When we compare ourselves to others and feel bad about who we’re not, it’s easy to become jealous. And when we compare ourselves to others and feel superior, we slip into pride. Both foster deeper levels of insecurity. Avoid the comparison trap so you can avoid the cycle of insecurity that breeds jealousy and pride.
3. *Be a learner.* One of the best ways to defeat insecurity is to learn from the people who make you feel insecure. Embrace a teachable spirit, and glean wisdom and insight from people who are experiencing success in ministry. Rather than lamenting about who you’re not, learn from who they are. You’ll be amazed at how this reduces your insecurity. It may even spark a new friendship.

Again, we all deal with insecurity. The question is, are you willing to address it before it begins to grow in your heart?

Reflect and Discuss

1. In what areas of leadership or ministry are you most prone to feel insecure?
2. Which of the three tips above speaks most to you?
3. What other strategies have you found helpful in conquering insecurity?

Apply

At the root of insecurity is an identity issue. Make a list of Scriptures that address your identity in Christ. Turn these Scriptures into a daily declaration to remind yourself of where your identity is found and who you are in Christ.

GUARDING YOUR HEART IN LEADERSHIP

1 Insecurity: Leading When You Feel Unqualified

Assess

When has insecurity gotten the best of you as a leader?

We all experience some measure of insecurity in leadership and in ministry. Moses certainly did when God commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. Moses asked, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11).

How to guard your heart against insecurity:

1. *Anchor your _____ in Christ.*

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

God loves you and is pleased with you, regardless of what kind of success you have in leadership.

2. *Avoid the _____ trap.*

Comparison often leads to one of two extremes: jealousy or pride.

3. *Be a _____.*

One of the best ways to defeat insecurity is to learn from the people who make you feel insecure. Embrace a teachable spirit, and glean wisdom and insight from people who are experiencing success in ministry.

Apply

At the root of insecurity is an identity issue. Make a list of Scriptures that address your identity in Christ. Turn these Scriptures into a daily declaration to remind yourself of where your identity is found and who you are in Christ.

2 Jealousy: Leading When Others Are Succeeding

Team Review

What Scriptures did you include in your daily declaration to help you overcome insecurities?

Assess

How might jealousy show itself in a leader's life?

Insights and Ideas

How often have you scrolled through your favorite social media platform only to find yourself becoming jealous of what you see? Somebody's perfect vacation reminds you of your imperfect life. A pastor's booming congregation reminds you of your struggle to break out from an attendance plateau. Someone else's success reminds you of your own shortcoming.

We see an example of this with Saul and David. First Samuel 18:6–7 says, "When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.'"

How did Saul respond? According to verses 8–9, "Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?' And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David." The *New Living Translation* says Saul kept a "jealous eye" on David.

How can you guard your heart against jealousy? Start with two strategies:

1. **Express gratitude.** Saul compared himself with David, and the result was a jealous spirit. Author Craig Groeschel says, "Comparison makes us resent God's goodness in other people's lives and ignore God's goodness in our own lives." The antidote to jealousy is gratitude.
2. **Celebrate others.** When the apostle Paul was in prison, he learned that others were preaching the gospel with impure motives. How did Paul respond? He said, "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice" (Philippians 1:18). Paul celebrated the success of others, even when their motives were misdirected.

Don't just tolerate the success of others; celebrate it. Someone once said, "Stop being jealous of people in their winning season. You don't know what they lost in their losing season."

Reflect and Discuss

1. Share an example of when jealousy settled in your heart as a leader.
2. How does gratitude uproot jealousy?
3. Whose win can you celebrate right now?

Apply

Start a gratitude journal for the next 30 days by writing down two things you are thankful for each day. Then take a few minutes each week to celebrate God's goodness in the lives of others by calling them or sending texts or emails.

2 Jealousy: Leading When Others Are Succeeding

Assess

How might jealousy show itself in a leader's life?

How often have you scrolled through your favorite social media platform only to find yourself becoming jealous of what you see?

“When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands’” (1 Samuel 18:6–7).

“Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. ‘They have credited David with tens of thousands,’ he thought, ‘but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?’ And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David” (1 Samuel 18:8–9).

How to guard your heart against jealousy:

1. *Express* _____.

“Comparison makes us resent God’s goodness in other people’s lives and ignore God’s goodness in our own lives.” — Craig Groeschel

2. _____ *others*.

“But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (Philippians 1:18).

“Stop being jealous of people in their winning season. You don’t know what they lost in their losing season.”

Apply

Start a gratitude journal for the next 30 days by writing down two things you are thankful for each day. Then take a few minutes each week to celebrate God’s goodness in the lives of others by calling them or sending texts or emails.

3 Anger: Leading When You're Mad

Team Review

What difference has keeping a gratitude journal made in your struggle with jealousy?

Assess

When have you struggled with anger as a leader?

Insights and Ideas

Mark Twain once said, “Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” When we store anger in our hearts, it begins to overshadow everything we say and do.

The apostle Paul warns of anger’s danger in Ephesians 4:26–27. “In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” The Greek word for foothold means “location.” Paul was saying, “When the sun sets on your anger, you’re giving the enemy a new location in your life.” It’s like inviting the enemy into a guest room in your heart.

In verse 31, Paul continues, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Two kinds of animosity are evident in this text:

1. *Stewing*. Bitterness and malice can be like an internal smoldering. Hurt simmers under the surface and warps perspectives and attitudes.
2. *Spewing*. When these feelings spill over, the eruption may spew on others in the form of rage, brawling and slander. Proverbs 29:11 says, “Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.”

What should you do instead? Paul says, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Notice three action steps to guard your heart against anger:

- *Be kind*. Kindness involves putting others first. This makes sense considering that much of our anger comes from not getting our way.
- *Be compassionate*. Compassionate people have empathy toward others. As John Maxwell says, “Instead of putting others in their place, we must put ourselves in their place.”
- *Forgive*. To defeat anger, we have to forgive. When we try to hold onto anger, it holds onto our hearts. Forgiveness releases us from anger’s fury.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Are you more of a “stewer” or a “spewer” when it comes to anger?
2. What does it look like to put others first when you’re angry?
3. How can you practice forgiveness?

Apply

Do a prayerful audit of your heart. What makes you angry? What specific actions could you take to extend kindness and forgiveness to those with whom you are angry?

3 Anger: Leading When You're Mad

Assess

When have you struggled with anger as a leader?

“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” — Mark Twain

“In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:26–27).

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“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:31).

Two forms of anger:

1. _____.

Bitterness and malice can be like an internal smoldering. Hurt simmers under the surface and warps perspectives and attitudes.

2. _____.

“Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end” (Proverbs 29:11).

How to guard your heart against anger:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

• *Be* _____.

• *Be* _____.

• _____.

Apply

Do a prayerful audit of your heart. What makes you angry? What specific actions could you take to extend kindness and forgiveness to those with whom you are angry?

4 Pride: Leading When You Want the Credit

Team Review

What steps have you taken to prevent anger from controlling your heart and negatively impacting your leadership?

Assess

What impact have you seen pride make in a leader's life?

Insights and Ideas

In Luke 18, Jesus describes a Pharisee and a tax collector who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (Luke 18:11–12). Not only did the Pharisee declare himself superior to others, but he also reminded God of his spirituality. The Pharisee's heart was full of pride.

The tax collector, on the other hand, prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (verse 13). His posture of humility attracted the mercy of God. Jesus concluded the story with these words: "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (verse 14).

There's an important lesson in this story: We have a role, and God has a role. Our role is to humble ourselves, and God's role is to exalt us. When we switch roles we experience problems.

How do we guard our hearts against pride when we find ourselves longing for the credit and praise? Here are four keys:

1. *Practice the Golden Rule.* Jesus said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). People want to be treated with dignity and respect (as do you), but the Pharisee's prayer expressed the exact opposite toward the tax collector. We cultivate humility when we elevate the value of others rather than looking down on them.
2. *Ask more questions.* The more we talk, the more arrogant we tend to sound. Proverbs 10:19 says, "Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues." We all like to talk about ourselves, but by choosing to ask more questions, our humility creates curiosity about others.
3. *Share the credit.* Pride loves to attract attention and take all the credit. Instead, freely give credit to those who did the work. Acknowledge their hard work and express gratitude for their commitment, selfless service, and spirit of excellence.
4. *Get in the trenches.* When we serve alongside team members rather than ruling over them, we demonstrate humility. Leadership should be more about serving than pursuing perks, power and privilege. Jesus said, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).

Reflect and Discuss

1. Why do leaders often struggle with pride?
2. How does the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector speak to you?
3. Which of the four keys to cultivating humility do you find most challenging?

Apply

Pick at least one of the four keys to cultivating humility to focus on for the next 30 days. Think about practical ways to express this quality, and ask God to help you grow in humility.

4 Pride: Leading When You Want the Credit

Assess

What impact have you seen pride make in a leader's life?

"God, I thank you that I am not like other people — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (Luke 18:11–12).

"God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

There's an important lesson in this story: We have a role, and God has a role. Our role is to humble ourselves, and God's role is to exalt us. When we switch roles we experience problems.

How to guard your heart against pride:

1. *Practice the* _____ *Rule.*

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

2. *Ask more* _____.

"Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues" (Proverbs 10:19).

3. *Share the* _____.

4. *Get in the* _____.

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26).

Apply

Pick at least one of the four keys to cultivating humility to focus on for the next 30 days. Think about practical ways to express this quality, and ask God to help you grow in humility.

5 Burnout: Leading When You're Exhausted

Team Review

What steps have you taken toward cultivating humility?

Assess

How do you know when you're in danger of burning out?

Insights and Ideas

One of the earliest examples of burnout can be found in Exodus 18:17–18 when Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came to him and said, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone."

Moses was burning the candle at both ends, and it was driving him into an unsustainable pattern.

The same can happen today. If you find yourself constantly drained, cynical, anxious, apathetic or moody, you may be on the verge of emotional burnout. To guard your heart against burnout, start with these five strategies:

1. *Develop an inner circle.* You cannot beat burnout alone. Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up." Your inner circle should include family, friends, coaches and a counselor. These key relationships will feed you spiritually, emotionally and relationally.
2. *Create a sustainable rhythm.* If you're teetering on the brink of burnout, take a hard look at your schedule. How many nights per week are you out? When do your days start and end? Are you taking a sabbath? Create an ideal schedule that creates a healthy rhythm between work, family, friends, rest and personal time.
3. *Prioritize and delegate.* Identify your highest priorities, and then delegate other tasks. That's what Moses had to do. He boiled down his priorities to leading, teaching, modeling the way, and selecting leaders. He delegated everything else.
4. *Find healthy distractions.* Healthy distractions are hobbies and habits that fill your tank. Healthy distractions can include things like exercise, reading, gardening, hiking, or any number of life-giving activities. Without healthy distractions, you can slip into unhealthy habits and even addictions.
5. *Cultivate spiritual intimacy.* Finally, feed your spirit. Protect your time with God, and cultivate intimacy with Him through prayer, Bible study, journaling, worship, and unhurried devotion.

You can't do your job effectively unless you are healthy. Take steps now to move toward greater health before you burn out.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What about our culture contributes to leaders burning out?
2. When have you struggled with feeling burned out? How did you deal with it?
3. Which of the five strategies above do you most need to implement in your life?

Apply

On a scale from 1 to 10, how close are you to burnout right now? Do a careful assessment of the five areas listed above, and put together a plan to become healthy again. Things won't change overnight, but with these tips, you can move closer to a place of health.

GUARDING YOUR HEART IN LEADERSHIP

5 Burnout: Leading When You're Exhausted

Assess

How do you know when you're in danger of burning out?

"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Exodus 18:17–18).

How to guard your heart against burnout:

1. *Develop an inner* _____.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10).

2. *Create a sustainable* _____.

Create an ideal schedule that creates a healthy rhythm between work, family, friends, rest and personal time.

3. *Prioritize and* _____.

Moses boiled down his priorities to leading, teaching, modeling the way, and selecting leaders. He delegated everything else.

4. *Find* _____ *distractions*.

Healthy distractions are hobbies and habits that fill your tank. Without healthy distractions, you can slip into unhealthy habits and even addictions.

5. *Cultivate* _____ *intimacy*.

Feed your spirit. Protect your time with God, and cultivate intimacy with Him through prayer, Bible study, journaling, worship, and unhurried devotion.

Apply

On a scale from 1 to 10, how close are you to burnout right now? Do a careful assessment of the five areas listed above, and put together a plan to become healthy again. Things won't change overnight, but with these tips, you can move closer to a place of health.

6

Offense: Leading When You're Wounded

Team Review

What steps have you taken to beat burnout and create a sustainable rhythm?

Assess

What's one of the biggest offenses you've ever experienced?

Insights and Ideas

In Matthew 5:21–22, Jesus talked about the danger of anger. He said, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

We've already talked about the emotion of anger, but this passage reveals a *progression in anger*, and the starting place is often an offense. When we are offended, our hearts give way to wounding that can lead to deeper emotional issues. That's why we have to guard our hearts against offense. Here's how:

1. *Don't seek revenge*. Revenge is an overreaction to offense. Leviticus 19:18 says, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.”
2. *Be gracious*. In Colossians 4:6, Paul wrote, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” A gracious response keeps the offense from turning into a full-on battle.
3. *Deal with offense biblically*. Jesus said, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’” (Matthew 18:15–16). Start by going to the person privately. If that doesn't work, bring someone else into the conversation.
4. *Look for the kernel of truth*. Sometimes there is an element of truth in the thing that has offended you. Look for the truth, and then let it stimulate your growth.
5. *Forgive*. Colossians 3:13 says, “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Following the example of Jesus means letting go of grievances and extending forgiveness to those who hurt or offend you.

If we don't guard our hearts as leaders, we'll personalize the wounds that come our way. We need both soft hearts and thick skin.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How do you typically respond when you feel offended?
2. How do you protect your heart from offense while still trusting people?
3. Which of the five strategies for dealing with offense most speaks to you?

Apply

What offense are you currently carrying that is putting down roots in your heart? Whom do you need to forgive? Proactively take steps to deal with that offense today so your heart doesn't become jaded or hardened.

6

Offense: Leading When You're Wounded

Assess

What's one of the biggest offenses you've ever experienced?

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21–22).

How to guard your heart against offense:

1. *Don't seek* _____.

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

2. *Be* _____.

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6).

3. *Deal with offense* _____.

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'" (Matthew 18:15–16).

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Sometimes there is an element of truth in the thing that has offended you. Look for the truth, and then let it stimulate your growth.

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"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

Apply

What offense are you currently carrying that is putting down roots in your heart? Whom do you need to forgive? Proactively take steps to deal with that offense today so your heart doesn't become jaded or hardened.

7

Cynicism: Leading When You've Lost Hope

Team Review

What has God done in your heart in the area of releasing offenses?

Assess

What does a cynical leader sound like?

Insights and Ideas

Most people enter leadership with lots of optimism and hopeful ambition. They expect to flourish in their roles and lead the way to positive changes. But after years of leading, many slip into a pattern of cynicism. They no longer believe things will change. When passionate leaders with bold visions encounter criticism and harsh realities, hope often fades.

This isn't the way God wants us to lead. As followers of Jesus, we should be the most hopeful people. Cynicism has no place in our hearts, and yet this deadly emotion can undermine our attitudes in the present and our vision for the future.

Philip told Nathanael, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45).

Nathanael's response was cynical: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Philip simply responded, "Come and see" (verse 46).

Nathanael had his doubts about Nazareth. Perhaps he was cynical about the coming of the Messiah, too. After all, how long had the Jews waited for this promise to be fulfilled? Had Nathanael lost all hope?

That's what cynicism does to the spirit. It snuffs out hope. It looks at life through the lens of criticism and doubt.

Here are three ways to guard your heart against cynicism:

1. *Dwell on the God of hope.* We lose hope when we focus on disappointments instead of on God. Jeremiah 29:11 says God's plans are to "give you hope and a future."
2. *Cultivate curiosity.* When leaders grow stagnant or settle on a plateau, they lose their curiosity. Without curiosity, we stop growing. Without curiosity, we settle for yesterday's answers to tomorrow's problems. Without curiosity, we become cynical of anything new.
3. *Dream again.* The rocky terrain of leadership can cause us to lose sight of the horizon and give up on our dreams. Pull away for a day or two to dream again. Don't let cynicism silence the visions God's Spirit wants to birth in you.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What symptoms of cynicism have you observed in leaders?
2. In what way have you become cynical in your life and leadership?
3. Which of the three steps above do you most need to take today to keep cynicism from settling in your heart?

Apply

Do a "hope audit" on your life. On a scale from 1 to 10, rate these three areas: your hope in God, your level of curiosity, and your dream for the future. Then pull away for a day to be with God, spark your personal growth, and dream again.

7 Cynicism: Leading When You've Lost Hope

Assess

What does a cynical leader sound like?

Most people enter leadership with lots of optimism and hopeful ambition. They expect to flourish in their roles and lead the way to positive changes. But after years of leading, many slip into a pattern of cynicism. They no longer believe things will change. In short, hope vanishes.

Philip told Nathanael, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

Nathanael’s response was cynical: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (1:46).

Phillip responded, “Come and see” (v 46).

How to guard your heart against cynicism:

1. *Dwell on the _____ of hope.*

God’s plans are to “give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

2. *Cultivate _____.*

When leaders grow stagnant or settle on a plateau, they lose their curiosity. Without curiosity, we stop growing.

3. _____ *again.*

The rocky terrain of leadership can cause us to lose sight of the horizon and give up on our dreams.

Apply

Do a “hope audit” on your life. On a scale from 1 to 10, rate these three areas: your hope in God, your level of curiosity, and your dream for the future. Then pull away for a day to be with God, spark your personal growth, and dream again.



Guilt: Leading When You Need Grace

Team Review

How did your day alone with God diminish the spirit of cynicism and spark fresh hope for the future?

Assess

How does perfectionism lead to guilt?

Insights and Ideas

Leaders live under a microscope. Everyone has an opinion about what we do wrong and how we could do better. The pressure often leads to an unhealthy drive to do more, be more, and accomplish more. It's an exhausting race in pursuit of something that is ultimately unattainable.

But we don't have to live and lead with a guilt-ridden heart. How do we break free from this crippling emotion? How do we guard our hearts against guilt and step into grace instead? Start with three steps:

1. **Identity:** *Lead from a place of grace.* When people remind us of our leadership gaps, it's easy to live out of guilt and shame. But Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We are forgiven, and when we live from that reality, we can lead from a place of grace.
2. **Boundary:** *Establish clear parameters.* There's nothing wrong with having a standard of excellence and desiring to give your very best. But when excellence crosses the line into perfectionism, we create unnecessary stress. That's why it's important to create clear boundaries when it comes to time management, deadlines, and expectations. The right boundaries keep you from the habits and hang-ups that often bring guilt and shame.
3. **Vocabulary:** *Speak a new narrative.* Each of us has an inner narrative. It's what we tell ourselves when we mess up. It's the storyline we believe when we trip up. But if our vocabulary is out of sync with what God says about us, we'll live under the cloud of guilt and feel a constant sense of disappointment. Change your vocabulary. Stop listening to what your inner critic says, and start reminding yourself of the truth in God's Word.

It's not always easy to walk in grace. Our past, and the people around us, sometimes remind us of our flaws and failures. In those moments, we can let Hebrews 4:16 center us: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Reflect and Discuss

1. How has guilt threatened to undermine your leadership?
2. How can we create a more grace-filled culture with our team?
3. Which of the three steps above offered a new perspective to help you lead without the cloud of guilt?

Apply

Put into practice the three steps described in this lesson. Remind yourself that you are forgiven, and seek God's grace and mercy in your time of need. Set clear boundaries so you don't try to live up to an unrealistic, guilt-inducing standard. And create a list of Scriptures that remind you of who you are in Christ.



Guilt: Leading When You Need Grace

Assess

How does perfectionism lead to guilt?

Leaders live under a microscope. Everyone has an opinion about what we do wrong and how we could do better. The pressure often leads to an unhealthy drive to do more, be more, and accomplish more. It's an exhausting race in pursuit of something that is ultimately unattainable.

How to guard your heart against guilt:

1. _____: *Lead from a place of grace.*

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

2. _____: *Establish clear parameters.*

There's nothing wrong with having a standard of excellence and desiring to give your very best. But when excellence crosses the line into perfectionism, we create unnecessary stress.

3. _____: *Speak a new narrative.*

Each of us has an inner narrative. It's what we tell ourselves when we mess up. Change your vocabulary. Stop listening to what your inner critic says, and start reminding yourself of the truth in God's Word.

“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Apply

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9

Fear: Leading When You're Scared

Team Review

How has your mindset changed since taking steps to reduce guilt?

Assess

When are you most afraid in leadership?

Insights and Ideas

Fear is a crippling emotion. When it captures our hearts, it silences our dreams. When it becomes our lens for leading, it becomes a lid on our leadership. It reminds us of our past, haunts us in the present, and holds the future hostage.

Joshua no doubt dealt with fear. After Moses died, Joshua took up the mantle to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. He must have wondered, *After having a leader like Moses, will the people follow me? If the people wouldn't enter the Promised Land 40 years ago, will their children make the same mistake?*

But God silenced Joshua's fears with words that infuse the heart with courage: "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them" (Joshua 1:6). So, how do we build on this truth, silence the emotion of fear, and develop a courageous heart? Start by focusing on three P's:

1. **Purpose:** *Hold onto your promise.* When God told Joshua to be strong and courageous, He gave him a reason: "because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them." The lesson is clear: Purpose gives you the power to face your greatest fears. When you hold onto the promise God has given you, it gives you a reason to keep staring down fear as you put one foot in front of the other.
2. **Presence:** *Remember God is here and there.* Pursuing a bold vision can feel like you're standing on the edge of a diving board looking down into dense fog. In such times, you have to remember that the same God who is nudging you to jump is waiting for you in the water below. He's *here* and *there*. God is *with* you, and He is *waiting* for you. He is omnipresent.
3. **People:** *Surround yourself with belief.* When God calls you to step out in faith and courage, there will be plenty of naysayers. That's why you have to surround yourself with belief. In other words, look for people of courage to stand by you and walk with you.

Fear is a powerful emotion, but with God's help, we can defeat it and walk fully into His plan.

Reflect and Discuss

1. When has fear stopped you in your tracks as a leader?
2. What inspires you about the story of Joshua?
3. In what area do you need more courage today?

Apply

What do you need more of as you face your fears in leadership? Do you need a clearer, more compelling purpose? Are you spending enough time in God's presence? Are you surrounding yourself with people who believe in you? Take steps to shore up any areas of weakness.

9

**Fear:
Leading When You're Scared****Assess**

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How to guard your heart against fear:

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Apply

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10 Worry: Leading When You're Uncertain

Team Review

What step did you take to become more courageous in the face of fear?

Assess

What do you most worry about as a leader?

Insights and Ideas

We all face uncertainty in life — and with that comes worry and anxiety. There's no single cure. Relief may come through praying, reading God's Word, spending time with friends and family, and even seeking professional counseling.

We can also lean into the helpful perspective of Philippians 4:4–7: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

When you give thanks, God's peace stands guard over your heart and mind. But notice the first thing Paul says to do: *rejoice*. In other words, worship is one way to keep worry from overtaking you. What difference does worship make?

1. *Worship changes our perspective.* When we worry, we tend to adopt a high view of our problems and a low view of our God. The size of our worry distracts us from the size of our God. To break this cycle, it helps to focus on something bigger than our worry. In other words, rather than enlarging our view of the problem, we need to enlarge our view of God.
2. *Worship disarms our worry.* Worship robs worry of its weightiness. Isaiah 61:3 reminds us that God gives us a “garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Praise breaks the heaviness, and when we develop a habit of worship, the weightiness of worry begins to lift.

If the emotion of worry is keeping you up at night, choose to worship. And if you find worry paralyzing your ability to lead effectively, seek out a counselor to walk with you in the journey.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How does worry undermine a leader's effectiveness?
2. What difference does worship make in your day-to-day life?
3. How do Paul's words inspire you, especially when you consider he was in prison when he wrote them?

Apply

Set aside some time to worship together as a team. Start by presenting your worries to the Lord in prayer, and then shift your focus entirely to worshipping the Lord. Afterward, reflect on the difference it has made.

10 Worry: Leading When You're Uncertain

Assess

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We all face uncertainty in life — and with that comes worry and anxiety.

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How worship guards your heart against worry:

1. *Worship changes our* _____.

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2. *Worship* _____ *our worry.*

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Apply

Set aside some time to worship together as a team. Start by presenting your worries to the Lord in prayer, and then shift your focus entirely to worshipping the Lord. Afterward, reflect on the difference it has made.