

## **“Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership”**

**Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima**

**Kindle Notes By Dave Kraft**

The majority of tragically fallen Christian leaders during the past ten to fifteen years have been baby boomers who felt driven to achieve and succeed in an increasingly competitive and demanding church environment. At the core of the problem is personal ambition and the insidious desire to have or possess something that is not able to be possessed; namely success. I firmly believe that if we could help pastors and Christian leaders make this paradigm shift in the way they view success and help them understand that the ultimate objective of the Christian faith is striving to be rather than striving to have or to do, we would greatly reduce the number of leadership failures within Christendom.

There have been far too many leaders who have chosen to continue their attempts at personal-image management in the face of a dark side that is glaringly obvious to everyone but them; all in a pathetic attempt to save face and maintain their shining public persona rather than take the inward journey that leads to personal wholeness and holiness.

But almost always in those cases, the dark side eventually brings down the curtain on those leaders in a dramatic and often destructive way. The dark side, though sounding quite sinister, is actually a natural result of human development. It is the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown to us until we experience an emotional explosion. In almost every case the factors that eventually undermine us are shadows of the ones that contribute to our success. The "dark side" refers to our inner urges, compulsions, motivations, and dysfunctions that drive us toward success or undermine our accomplishments. Our dark side develops slowly over a lifetime of experiences and is often revealed in moments of frustration or anger.

Why is it that we always assume that our leadership is good? Why do we believe that our vision for God's church is always the right vision and that for anyone to question or challenge our vision is tantamount to insubordination against God himself leaders that we perceive to be exceptionally confident and in command are often compensating for a deeply rooted sense of inferiority and insecurity. We want to communicate the incredible danger that is possible when we allow ourselves and others to be victimized by the dark side because of our failure or refusal to take that inward journey and "ride the monster all the way down," Regardless of the pain it may cause us. When leaders refuse to take the inward journey to explore and resolve their dark side issues, the result will often be some form of leadership failure. It was this warped view of a work ethic inculcated during childhood that nearly led to a complete emotional breakdown. First human leadership failure was the result of unrestrained pride and selfishness with a healthy dose of self-deception.

This vague sense of ambition is a sign that our dark side is alive and well. Some leaders experience a profound need to be approved by those they lead and to know that they are accepted and appreciated. This is not just the ordinary, normal desire we all possess to be liked by others but rather a desperate, almost life-sustaining need to gain approval. In short, any behavior that seems to overpower us as well as any urge or motivation that seems to uncontrollably drive us is a possible sign indicating the presence of our dark side.

### A Pyramid of Needs

The concept of the hierarchy of needs, developed by Abraham Maslow, is familiar to most leaders who have taken an introductory psychology course, but fewer leaders are aware of the significant role this familiar concept plays in the development of their dark side. Maslow postulated that every person operates on the basis of a pyramid of needs and wants. This pyramid of needs is arranged hierarchically, ranging from basic physiological needs at the base to safety needs, needs for affection and belonging, the need for esteem, and ultimately the need for self-actualization.' Maslow's thesis is that people must have their needs met at one level of this pyramid before they will move on to satisfy their needs at a higher level.

This quest to satisfy our needs ends only with death. It is not a static process but rather one that is quite dynamic. For example, it is possible to have our basic needs for safety met for a period of time, but that does not mean those needs are satisfied for life. There may come a time when we experience some tragedy or event that threatens our feelings of safety and causes us to revert for a time to a lower level on the pyramid. This can be a real event that we experience firsthand, or it can be a tragedy that has happened to someone else to whom we feel close. Reading about an assault or murder in the neighborhood where we live is one of those events that can cause our safety need to be threatened even though the attack did not happen directly to us. When we feel unsafe, we revert to that level of need from a higher one.

### Missing Blocks in Our Pyramid

As Maslow's pyramid graphically demonstrates, we all have essential needs that must be met. As children and adolescents we do not spend much time contemplating the fulfillment of these needs; it is essentially a subconscious process.' And yet the satisfaction of these needs is vital to our healthy development. What happens when some of these most basic needs are never adequately satisfied?

Worse yet, what happens when we experience some traumatic event during our childhood or developmental years that causes us to feel permanently threatened in one of these essential areas, even though that level of need might be satisfied in many other respects? When this happens, we end up with missing blocks in our need pyramid that we will attempt to meet, often subconsciously.

This is the heart of how our dark side begins to develop. When certain events threaten us in one of our need areas or when we are deprived in any way, we should expect meeting that need to become a controlling element of our personality.

In virtually every field of endeavor, leaders have knowingly and unknowingly ridden the wave of their dark side to astounding success. The key that will determine whether we experience success or tragic failure is the degree to which we become acquainted with our dark side and put in place the defenses that will prevent it from running rampant and trampling our ability to lead effectively. There are many pastors and spiritual leaders today who feel the need to be in complete control of their organization in every minute detail. Compulsive leaders see the organization they lead as an extension and reflection of themselves. Therefore, any flaws in the organization are seen as a direct reflection on them personally.

**The narcissistic leaders** have an overinflated sense of their importance to the organization and an exhibitionistic need for constant attention. Narcissistic leaders also tend to overestimate their own achievements and abilities while stubbornly refusing to recognize the quality and value of the same in others. When the leader is constantly beginning new ministries, even when existing, essential ministries are not adequately staffed or effective, it is a sign of narcissism. Some signs of a narcissistic leader include the following: Narcissistic leaders are driven to succeed by a need for admiration and acclaim. They may have an overinflated sense of importance as well as great ambitions and grandiose fantasies.

Because of their suspicions, **paranoid leaders** will often create rigid structures and systems of control within their organization that enable them to keep their finger in every piece of the organizational pie and limit the autonomy of underlings and associates. Excessive staff meetings and reporting are often the result of this need to keep close tabs on those around them. Unfortunately, contemporary Sauls are sprinkled throughout the ranks of spiritual leadership.

**Codependency** does not fall into any one category of recognized personality disorder. In an effort to keep everyone happy and gain approval, the codependent pastor can find himself being overtaken by the urgent needs of others while giving little attention to the overall direction of the church as a whole. So how do you determine if you are codependent in the exercise of your leadership? Chances are that just reading the profiles in this chapter has brought you close to an answer. However, in an effort to provide more specific help, the following inventory is offered for your own personal assessment.

One way of overcoming your dark side is to resist the poison of unrealistic expectations. The weight of expectations can cause even the most compliant and well-intentioned person to snap under the heavy load. In 1995 Dr. Robert Edmondson surveyed interviewed thirty pastors who had left pastoral ministry permanently and thirty churches that had lost their pastors.

Dr. Edmondson found that the second leading reason pastors left the ministry was the unwritten expectations of the pastor (the first was "burnout").' If we are to overcome the power of the dark side, it will require resisting the poison of extra-biblical, unrealistic, legalistic expectations in favor of God's liberating grace.

Another is to practice the discipline of self-knowledge. One more is to understand your identity in Christ