



Leading Yourself by Greg Atkinson (GregAtkinson.com)

Know Your Identity

Salvation and who you are in Christ. If you don't recognize that you're a sinner saved by grace and a child of God, you'll be seeking the approval of others. Stay grounded in Christ and in His Word.

Stay humble. I know this is easier said than done, but I think it's a sobering thought to keep our pride (which we all struggle with), ego and attitudes in check.

Some of the best advice someone gave me years ago was to not take myself too seriously. I've tried to live by that and laugh a lot. Does my pride sometimes still flare up? Absolutely. Does my ego pop up from time to time. Sure. But I eventually come to my senses, repent and get back to a Christ-centered, God-sized view of who I am and Who He is.

This concept is especially challenging for gifted and talented individuals. Some pastors can really preach. Some worship leaders are very good musicians. Some video editors have mad skills. Some designers – well all designers have egos, but the point is a lot of Church leaders are talented and it's easy to see why they wrestle with staying humble.

The problem is when we start relying on our strength, skills and ability and stop praying for Christ through the Holy Spirit to lead through us, preach and teach through us, sing and play through us, edit and design through us.

We must have the perspective of vessels, jars of clay and a Heavenly Potter sculpting us and shaping us and using us for great things according to His plans and His purpose.

A foundational concept and principle for all Church leaders is to lead like Jesus and be a servant leader. If you haven't already, I'd strongly encourage you to read Ken Blanchard's book *Lead Like Jesus*.

In order to understand the heart, mind and leadership skills of Christ, all one has to do is read through the Gospels. I know you've read them before, but go back and read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John through the lens of leading like Jesus and see if you learn something new and God through the Holy Spirit can open your heart to true servant leadership.

Know Your Battle

Years ago I read a book called *The Bondage Breaker* by Neil Anderson. In the book, Neil says of spiritual warfare, "If you're a Christian, you're a target. If you're in ministry, you're a bullseye." That statement struck me hard and has always stayed with me.

The Bible warns us, too. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." Later verse 9 goes on to say, "Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are."

So, we are encouraged to "stay alert" and "watch out". We're also told to "stand firm" and "be strong". We're also reminded that Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are fighting this same battle with a very real enemy.

It's important to keep this perspective as you go throughout your ministry career. You have a enemy – a shrewd, crafty and tricky, deceitful enemy that will do whatever it takes to frustrate you, discourage you, make you afraid, see you stumble and fall into sin and if he was allowed to – he'd kill you. This should sober you up and behoove you to put on your spiritual armor. (Ephesians 6:13-17).

There's nothing more precious to you and wanted by our enemy (remember the "You Have an Enemy" chapter?) than to be pure. I'm talking about your character and integrity – who you are when no one's looking.

Like being humble, this is also easier said than done. Purity flows out of the overflow of a heart that's in love with Jesus and walking in the Spirit daily. Purity

also takes a lot of wisdom, intentionality and purpose. You must set out to be pure and put up guards in your life to help protect your purity.

I've mentioned before that my wife and my best friend get sent an email of what websites I go to – this is a guard in my life. You may have something similar. It's important to protect yourself (and your kids) from the dangers of the internet. Purity also comes from setting boundaries with co-workers. It's not okay to flirt with your admin or that new woman on the children's ministry staff. You must know what is appropriate and what's not.

Part of setting up boundaries is to have some close friends that can hold you accountable, have permission to speak freely into your life and ask the tough questions. If you've ever struggled with porn or a wandering eye, you should confess that to a person of the same sex that you trust and ask them to check up on you. Meet with them from time to time to read the Bible, pray and just talk. If you've slipped up, tell them and confess out loud. Ask them to pray for you and see how you can pray for them. You'll probably find out you're not alone and you can be a source of strength for someone else in need.

Know Your Power Source

Stay on your knees. It's important that we are men and women of prayer. When we have a vibrant relationship with Christ and spend time communicating with Him in prayer, the natural attitude that will come out of us is one of humility. This is also where the fruits of the Spirit flourish.

Prayer is the lifeline for the Christian leader and pastor. Prayer keeps you grounded, focused, connected, informed, encouraged and most of all – it displays a true dependence on God. We all need to be dependent on God and the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Not praying shows a spirit of independence and thus leads to an attitude of pride and also can become overwhelming. We feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders and get stressed out.

I don't have to tell you what a huge problem burnout is for ministers, but I would like to point out that I think this concept is a great contributor to our burnout epidemic as a Church. Leaders try to operate out of their own strength and eventually crumble under the pressure.

Only dedicated time with God and hearing from His heart can fuel us and also keep us from sin (pride, lust, ambition to the point of sin, drivenness to the point of sin, etc.).

Staying on our knees (along with staying in the Word, which we'll cover next) is absolutely essential to your (and my) physical, spiritual and emotional health. At the end of the day, it all comes down to health. We want to be healthy in every way possible. Prayer can calm the storm that rages within and all around us.

Nothing gives you perspective, hope, guidance, direction, wisdom and encouragement like the Holy Bible – it's a remarkable book. I remember years ago hearing Henry Blackaby say "When you read the Word, it's as if you're staring right in the face of God." That always comforted and excited me to think about.

As Christians and Church leaders, we desire to have the fruits of the Spirit flow through us and out of us. Thanks to the book *The Spirit of the Disciplines* I read years ago, I learned that the fruit of the Spirit is something that happens naturally when we have a steady, real and vibrant relationship with Christ.

"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; **meditate on it** day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." – Joshua 1:8

Know Your Motive

Purity also means to be pure in our motives. Doing things out of our love for Christ and not to get attention. This is tough for many in ministry. We should serve because He first loved us and we desire to worship Him through our service.

Being driven and setting goals are great things, but you must constantly keep a check on your motives and why you do what you do. Who are you trying to please? Man, people, your boss or Christ?

Surrender your art, your talent, your skills to Christ and recognize that your gifts and talents come from Him.

Know Your Role

Anyone in ministry is a person under authority. From the senior pastor answering to a board, trustees or the congregation (depending on your governance) to the executive pastor answering to the senior pastor, to all staff (paid and volunteer) answering to the executive pastor or senior pastor. Everyone reports to somebody and should be held accountable.

Ultimately, we all answer to the Head of the Church: Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:23 tells us “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” But on a practical, day-to-day working relationship, how does this whole concept work itself out?

Basically, we need to keep in mind that there are no lone rangers in ministry. Ministry should be done as a team and everyone should have someone that holds them accountable for goals set, discipline, and growth as a professional and a leader.

In a meeting, when something is being discussed, you have every right to speak up, voice your opinion and fight for something you’re passionate about, but once the decision has been made, you must get on board and champion that cause as if it was your idea.

If you have something against your senior leadership (pastor, executive pastor, or elders/deacons) – keep that to yourself and take the initiative to seek them out (Matt. 18) and discuss your grievance with them privately. Don’t bad mouth your leadership to others inside or outside the church.

I don’t care how big the name, how great the personality or how gifted the communicator – all leaders are replaceable. Rick Warren could leave Saddleback and Saddleback would go on. Craig Groeschel could leave LifeChurch.tv and it would go on. Andy Stanley could leave North Point and it would go on. You get the picture.

This is a sign of good leadership and a church (local Body of Christ) that is not personality-driven and ego-centric. There are some churches (I’m not going to name them – that’s not the point of this) that would crumble if something happened to their senior pastor. That is a shame and a sign of poor leadership.

Know Where You’re Strong

Know your strengths (take the StrengthFinder2.0 test and study the way you’re wired) and seek to turn your areas of 7 and 8’s into 9’s and 10’s. Mentor others and share what you’ve learned and how you have been shaped throughout your ministry career.

Know Where You’re Weak

Based off of your gifting and areas of strength, come to know your blindside and areas of weakness. Seek out a mentor to coach and train you and help you grow in your areas of weakness. You won't be able to turn an area of 1 or 3 into a 9 or 10, but you can grow to a 3 or 5 and become more competent all around. Knowing your weaknesses also allows you to compensate and surround yourself with others (volunteer and/or paid staff) that can help you accomplish a task, project or run a ministry.

Know Where You're Headed

Set goals. Know where your church currently is and where they need to go. If you're a church of 200, look at churches of 500 and get ideas for what your communication ministry could be. If you're a church of 2000, look at churches 5000 or more in attendance to get ideas and inspiration.

Be in constant communication with your supervisor and your senior pastor to know their goals for the organization, where they feel you can help them accomplish the vision and mission of the church, and set appropriate goals to accomplish these tasks and projects.

Know Your Craft

Sing a new song of praise to him; *play skillfully* on the harp, and sing with joy. – Psalm 33:3

Don't just show up to work, bring your A-game. God wants you to constantly grow in your skill set and become a better leader, designer, communicator and artist.

Go to conferences, take some night or online classes. Go back to school and get your degree or Masters. Sharpen your skills. Leaders are learners and leaders are readers. What books are you reading? Who are you watching that's years down the road from in their experience and platform? Who are your peers in ministry that you stay in touch with, share ideas with and dream together with?

Where do you get inspiration? Do you think you're the best that ever was or do you look at what other churches are doing and learn from them? Constantly see what other systems, practices, procedures, promotions (Christmas, Easter, etc.) are being used around the country and allow them to shape your ministry.

BONUS:

1. Tenaciously pursue excellence
2. Embrace conflict - resist the tendency to avoid crucial conversations because they are uncomfortable.
3. Leverage influence instead of trying to control every decision - Hold things loosely
4. Make decisions out of trust instead of fear
5. Accept failure as a teaching tool – Give your best and then look for the beauty in the mess.
6. Accept responsibility / resist the urge to point fingers / the blame game puts insecurity on display for all to see.
7. Implement personal boundaries that bring health to you and your family. (Hours worked per week, late requests, confronting poor planning that damages relationships)

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Greg Atkinson is a pastor, author, consultant and speaker who loves Jesus, the gospel and the Church. Greg has been in ministry for over two decades and has been writing, training, speaking and motivating thousands of church leaders since 2000. Greg has been highly published in various magazines and on websites including ChurchLeaders.com, OutreachMagazine.com and Pastors.com, to name a few. He wrote the Foreword for the book *Facebook for Pastors* and is featured twice in the ChurchLeaders.com, *Top 100 Book for Top Articles* regarding Church Leadership. Greg's is the author of *Church Leadership Essentials* and *Strange Leadership*. Greg is currently the Editor of Christian Media Magazine.