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Whatever *You* Do

Six
Foundations
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Life

EDITED BY LUKE BOBO

Whatever You Do: Six Foundations for an Integrated Life

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Luke Bobo



Made to Flourish

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Now What?

Personal Wholeness: Vital for Effective Leadership

Gary Black, Jr.

In recent years a good number of non-profit Christian institutions and foundations have focused their attention on the moral foundations of prosperity and the necessary ethical foundations required for a society to flourish. These groups are engaging in crucial work to assist us in reimagining our previous conceptions and assumptions of complicated religious, economic, political, and social issues.¹³ Some of these organizations have realized that to best understand what factors lead to developing and sustaining, a holistically flourishing life, a society must also hold a robust understanding of what is good and right. In short, to live a “good” life, one must first understand and properly define what is, and is not, good.

It is instructive to recognize that ancient philosophers and theologians were aware and devoted time to pursuing credible answers to what is good. Classic philosophy and religion tend to focus on seeking answers to four basic questions, beginning with “What is the good life?” The great thinkers of every era have settled on the inescapable truth that human beings continually search for the components they believe will provide them a good life. To begin to answer this, one must also come to understand what is good, and also is real or lasting, which are the second and third questions. Finally, one must seek to understand the processes

required to answer the final question: How does one become a good person? All these components must converge to establish a foundation for human wholeness and flourishing.

Despite all that has changed across human history, the necessity of coming to reliable answers for these four questions has not changed. Ironically, what our increasingly secular, post-modern, post-Christian society is coming to re-realize is that economic, political, and social systems that affect huge swaths of our lives are themselves, like it or not, inherently moral realities. Ancient writers and thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, and Aquinas intrinsically knew that our social systems cannot succeed in creating the means to achieve human wholeness and thriving unless they incorporate and apply basic moral values. We must maintain a vivid understanding of what is good and bad, right and wrong, true and false in order to live good lives.

The Bible manifests unwavering support for the necessity of moral goodness within our economic, social, religious, and political responsibilities. This is most often referred to in Scripture as stewardship. The ancient Greek word for this stewardship task is *oikonomos*. Two important concepts are conveyed in the Greek understanding of a steward's role. The first concept is revealed by the prefix *oiko* (oy-coe), which is often translated home, house, dwelling place, or habitat. The second word *nomos* (no-moose) can mean rules, law, or custom. Therefore, the notion of *oikonomos* carries the idea of one who manages or applies the rules for a house. Today we might use the term leader, manager, overseer, or boss for those who occupy these types of *oikonomos* roles. Thus, a Christian disciple is expected to steward themselves and their work for the glory of God, God's kingdom objectives, for the benefit of everyone involved. This is commonly understood today as a fiduciary (faith or trust filled) relationship.¹⁴

The question I want to consider in this essay is whether and to what degree the holistic moral wellness of leaders, the people-in-charge, is crucial to every societal endeavor. Can we have good societies without

good leaders? Can we have good societies or institutions if they are not stewarded by morally sound leaders who seek to both know and then do good for all concerned? Put another way, “Can we build good buildings without using good bricks?” Today it seems clear that some believe any brick, no matter how unstable, will do.

Several years ago, while in the waiting room of my doctor’s office I remember finding a then article in *Forbes Magazine* written by Karl Moore.¹⁵ Moore is a professor on the Desautels Faculty at McGill University and was an associate fellow at Green Templeton College at Oxford University. He has spent much of his career reading, writing, and teaching about leadership. The article in my hands was Moore’s short review of Barbara Kellerman’s book, *The End of Leadership*.¹⁶ Kellerman is the founding director of Harvard’s Kennedy School Center for Public Leadership. Early in the article Moore made this significant point:

The current culture has emboldened followers, as Kellerman says, to “feel entitled to pry into their leaders’ lives – and to hold them accountable for what they do.” There has been a strong diminishment of authority in American culture. The ease of information dissemination, mainly through advancement in technology, had sped this devolution of power, as most can not only gain information more quickly, but can also discuss it with one another openly on the web. The impact of WikiLeaks for instance, was to diminish and expose leaders of American politics as being inept, weak and at times corrupt. Once this type of information starts to flow, it is very difficult to put it back in the box. This in turn, leads to a perception that leaders no longer merit their authority.¹⁷

After finishing the article, I thought about how Moore and Kellerman’s insights might apply to both my experience in Christian organizations, and more broadly, to American culture as a whole. Do we even care to know the truth? Does it matter to us if our leaders are ethically moral people or are we simply entertained by their fall? Have we come to the point where a certain level of effectiveness in a leadership role is the only

real measurement of success? Do our leaders have any responsibility to those they lead to be an example of moral courage and integrity? If we probe this line of questioning more deeply, we could even ask if a leader has a moral responsibility to steward his or her own soul well before God? If so, how are they to do that?

At a meta-level, part of our problem may be found in American or Western versions of evangelical Christianity. Our evangelical institutions (churches, universities, seminaries, parachurch organizations, etc.) have, for some time now, largely overlooked the subject of personal, moral character formation. We, and many of our most “successful” institutions have tended to focus on evangelism, and/or numerical/financial growth, to the detriment of robust discipleship. (See footnote for a more complete definition of discipleship.)¹⁸ There are many reasons for this that require more intensive attention than can be done here.¹⁹ However, one key motivation for this lack of attention to discipleship is imbedded in a misapplication of a key biblical doctrine. When the theological tenets of justification by faith are thought to be the beginning and end of the gospel story, then sanctification becomes a non-essential add on to the Christian life. A biblically valid understanding and application of Christlike discipleship, and the habits of sin it seeks to address and transform, is becoming progressively lost to mainstream evangelical congregations, universities, and seminaries. Sin, it turns out, doesn’t preach very well to a consumer driven society. In sum, Christian discipleship demands surrendering to the process of holistic transformation of character as an inescapable priority of the gospel Jesus preached. In this way the gospel is how Jesus provides for human beings to experience the unbridled wholeness God originally intended for us to experience and share.

Many Christian organizations will undoubtedly argue they have great numbers of programs and activities under the auspices of “discipleship ministries.” Yet, again, measuring actual results is much more important than simply creating activities with religiously

acceptable marketing labels. The closest one may get to a biblical understanding of discipleship in our contemporary churches today is most likely to be found in some form of recovery ministry. Addicts, those recovering from divorce or abuse, or those related to, and therefore suffering from the accompanying consequences of these decisions, will often have a practical understanding of the effects of sin and the necessity for character transformation. Unfortunately, these “recovery” ministries, though vital to the cause of Christ, tend to be outside the core purposes and vision of most churches. Hence too many modern Christians still tend to consider the prospect of discipleship as a non-essential aspect of Christian faith. Today many Christians treat spiritual transformation like the “protective” undercoating often presented to new car buyers as a luxury item; it has little or nothing to do with why they were attracted to the car in the first place.

In discipleship’s place we now talk about belonging to a community or a small group of some sort. All of which may be fine and good, if these groups are prepared and devoted to provide the level of intention the New Testament routinely demonstrates is necessary for engaging the types of personal and relational issues involved in moral character formation. In my experience this is rarely the case and often not the intention that tends to draw these kinds of groups together. Social groups that spend time in Bible study and prayer are important. But the evidence suggests that these types of fellowships alone are not developing the degree of moral character formation our society so desperately requires. Congregational leaders must train effective disciples, not just small group facilitators. Moral character is not formed by osmosis any more than it is developed through discussion groups led by well-meaning yet untrained leaders who are given no greater objective other than to make people feel welcome in order to generate faithful attendance. These are not the same intentions we find highlighted in the pages of the New Testament.

I propose it is the lack of a defined and applied process for moral formation, combined with a resistance to measure the success or failures of our current discipleship programs within our Christian institutions, that are the main causes behind the collapse of moral leadership that Moore and Kellerman describe. I fear the collapse of moral integrity and ethical leadership has now risen to epidemic proportions in the contemporary society and threatens to become the new normal. The recent #MeToo movement, which has spilled into our Christian organizations, is a case in point.²⁰ We must know why and how to stem this tide.

Furthermore, I suggest that leaders do have a moral responsibility to themselves, to God, and to those they serve through their leadership capacity, to steward their private and public lives in a godly way. I also propose that until our Christian leaders, both laity and clergy, advocate for, and personally engage in, a transparent and holistic process of moral character formation, our churches will not follow suit. It must begin and be sustained at the highest leadership positions in our organizations or it won't happen at all. Leaders lead best when they guide others to places they have visited themselves.

It is my firm belief that this level of moral stewardship of the body of Christ can and must take place. This is more than a blind hope or wishful thinking. We are fortunate that the process of moral character formation is simple to understand and apply. Everyone, regardless of place or position, can start wherever they find themselves, at any moment, to become an ever more faithful disciple of the life and teachings of Jesus. The first requirement is to decide one wants to follow in the footsteps of Christ. That the decision is simple and easy to understand does not mean the path is easy. However, we do have some good guides to encourage and help us along the way.

Renovation of the Heart

Some of the best thinking and writing on the subject of the good life and the process of moral character development comes to us through the insights and lived example of philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard. Willard's understanding of the human person is crucial to our task of holistic, transformational character development in our leaders. This can be found in his important yet widely overlooked work *Renovation of the Heart*.²¹

As a brief overview of Willard's project, *Renovation of the Heart* starts with an insightful investigation of the human self. His understanding of the best practices available for the transformation of moral character is best highlighted in what he calls the "Circles of the Self." He then expands this analysis by conjoining Jesus' gospel announcement of the reality of God's kingdom as the same means of grace that must also capture and transform each arena of a person's life; first the heart/spirit/will, then the mind, followed by the body, all of which then proceeds into each of our personal relationships. As this progressive transformation occurs, one's entire soul, or life, is increasingly redeemed or sanctified more fully into the likeness of the character of Christ.

Willard took great pains to define and describe all the key areas of a person's life that must come under the guidance and grace of God in order to experience lasting flourishing. The "Circles of the Self" begin to unfold a much-needed, yet rarely understood, explanation of the multi-layered, interdependent, symbiosis involved in the individual parts of everyday life. Willard argues that the overarching goal for any follower of Christ is to develop a level of integrity of character that allows one to take on the easy yoke of Jesus and results in applying the greatest commandment in every aspect of our lives (Matt 22:35-40).

Over the years many readers have found Willard's descriptions and warnings regarding the nature of the "ruined" (sin focused) soul a hauntingly accurate reflection of their own spiritual condition. But he did

not leave the reader hopeless. Willard takes great pains to meticulously describe how each of the intricate aspects of the human self can come under the love, grace, and freedom provided for those who abide in “the way, the truth and the life” of Christ. Many leaders have found Willard’s insights invaluable when seeking the intentions (why) and means (how) for establishing a careful, thoughtful, transformational, lifelong pursuit of Christlike character. Willard argues that such a life of abundance, modeled after Christ, is not only possible, but has been attained by many dedicated disciples over the ages. Renovation also specifically points to how and why Jesus in particular can and must be considered Christianity’s primary teacher and guide for Christian living. This is an idea too often forgotten today even in some of our most outwardly Christian institutions. Jesus is brilliant. And this brilliance includes the best knowledge available of what moral character is and how it should be formed.

Finally, in discussing the how and why of individual spiritual formation and the transformation of the internal life, Willard investigates the need for both sustained effort on the part of the disciple combined with the sustaining grace of God. Here we find a robust description of what holistic transformation would look like in the life of a disciple, and in the world at large. Willard also goes on to describe how churches and their leaders can and must facilitate a curriculum of transformation and suggests some methods needed in order to assist such a change.

In short, Willard argued that everyone has both the potential and the obligation before God to tend to the realities of their own soul. In that regard we are all equal. However, Willard also taught that leaders carry a greater burden. Biblical leadership involves accepting a higher responsibility to set an example of the means necessary for experiencing life to the full as a disciple of Jesus inside the kingdom of God.

The never-ending media barrage reveals leaders in nearly every area of our society, including Christian organizations, who are routinely discovered as failing to live up to their ethical and/or legal responsibilities. We read how leaders succumbed to some form of passion, a yearning, a weakness, a wound, an inappropriate relationship, and/or an ambition. The result is often a full-blown crisis that can threaten both the leaders and countless others at the existential level of the soul itself. Lifetimes of devotion are ruined, careers ended, institutions wrecked, marriages dissolved, trust destroyed, wounds inflicted, abuse of power runs amok in desperate attempts to hide the reality of it all, and worst of all, souls are set adrift. Too often the consequences of these failures carry lifetime sentences. Fortunately, nothing is beyond the mercy and forgiveness of Christ. But too few take the opportunity to abide in God's grace before they experience a moral failure. However, these failures also demonstrate that Willard's assessment and corrective is crucial for us to consider.

Washing the Inside of the Cup First

Fortunately, we have a means of avoiding these calamities. Jesus helps us understand the importance of tending first to the heart, which is the wellspring of our lives (Prov 4:23). For many of us, this truth hits us too late in life. Jesus makes this point in Matthew 23:25-28 when he conveys some harsh truths to the religious leaders of his day:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

How do we escape the plight of the religious Pharisee who is only interested in religion as a means of behavior modification but is not devoted to the inward transformation of a hardened heart? What follows are suggestions for leaders interested in developing an enduring Christlike character that produces fruit of the Spirit.

Long-term Habits of Self-Reflection

To begin the process of developing the kind of holistic integrity required of leaders in every area of the kingdom of God, we must start with committing lengthy periods of time for consistent, deep, honest, inward self-reflection. This reflection must tap into, among other things, the current condition of every aspect of one's soul (heart/will, mind, body, and relationships) before God. There are several excellent examples to follow for how one can engage in this process. Two of which can be found on a short list of Christianity's classic heroes of the faith. Leaders interested in developing their moral courage and integrity would do well to dive headlong into the works of Teresa of Avila, especially her *The Interior Castle*, and Augustine's *Confessions*. These works demonstrate many great attributes and potentialities that can grow out of initiating a contemplative life.

Few of our leaders take the time or realize the importance of engaging in an ongoing moral inventory of their actions, attitudes, motives, goals, intentions, relationships, and the means they are employing to achieve their objectives. Yet this is precisely the level of gritty honesty we encounter in Teresa and Augustine's work. One helpful tool to begin the self-assessment process is from Discipleship Dynamics, an organization created by a Christian psychologist and seminary professor who saw the need for a robust, comprehensive, statistically valid means for providing meaningful feedback to those seeking spiritual growth and identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Utilizing

175 probing questions, the goal of the assessment tool is to provide a “biblical, whole-life discipleship assessment that measures growth in 5 Dimensions and 35 Outcomes, evaluating attitudes and actions.”²² Many find that using an assessment tool that offers some objective feedback can be a helpful way to quickly and easily jump start the introspective journey of contemplating the state of one’s soul before God.

Secondly, once some data has been collected and a preliminary understanding of the status of one’s soul has begun, leaders must then commit to developing robust, enduring friendships. This is a crucial and most undervalued step in a leader’s internal life. The lack of development and commitment to faithful friendships is also where most efforts for moral transformation tend to flail and therefore fail. It is difficult to maintain one’s devotion to the cause of Christ, much less the integrity of one’s soul, without a true friend. Here the definition of “a friend” is key to understand. In his classic moral text, *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Greek philosopher Aristotle describes three kinds of friendships.²³ These are friends of pleasure, friends of utility, and friends of virtue. In short, friends of pleasure are those we seek to have a good time with. Friends of utility are often those we meet in the workplace, or who are our neighbors. We are friendly with these individuals in part because we need to work together for some purpose that necessitates a certain level of trustworthy relational interaction. Aristotle never suggests that friendships based on pleasure or utility are not important or valuable. They both serve important purposes in society.

The Importance of Virtuous Friends

However, what neither a relationship based on pleasure or utility provide is an irreplaceable focus on what gives human life enduring meaning and transcendent purpose. For that, Aristotle realizes, we need friends of virtue, who are committed to us, and we to them, not because of what we will gain, or whether we will “have a good time” with them

on Friday nights. Instead, friends of virtue are committed to us and we to them simply due to our shared commitment to the one another's highest and best good. These are the individuals who tell us the truth, and who we expect to tell us the truth, about the nature of who we are and what we are doing. They ask the hard questions, probe into our deepest hurts, and expose our most blinding lies. Friends of virtue are willing to push on sensitive areas of our lives and thus never shy away from the hard realities of life and leadership. Leaders can tend to be stubborn, prideful, overconfident in their own abilities and therefore blind to their faults. Leaders can also tend to listen only to either their fans or foes. Arrogant and insecure leaders are also well known for surrounding themselves with "yes" people, those who "get along by going along" with whatever the leader advises.

In contrast, friends of virtue try diligently to ground one another in reality. Therefore, they admonish and correct one another. Sometimes tough words and hard conversations are necessary. Some of the hardest words of encouragement come in the form of admonishment (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Tim 4; 2 Tim 2). There are moments where the temptation for a leader to save their job prevents them from doing their job. The propensity to rationalize excuses for shrinking in the face of adversity can be challenging. Friends of virtue help keep a leader's perspective and priorities in the appropriate places. This is often a messy and emotionally volatile hurdle for friends to navigate together. Yet maintaining some degree of false personal piety should never be used as an excuse to avoid the cluttered intricacies of the human condition. Too much is at stake. Friends of virtue walk headlong into the complexities of one another's souls out of a mutual love for, and understanding of, the power of virtue that enable us to live a life worthy of our calling.

Virtuous friendships are an indispensable necessity for any leader who hopes to live and lead in a way that honors the call of Christ. I would also suggest this is not a value I see celebrated in many of our churches. Living in community, unfortunately, is not often the same as living

together as friends seeking virtue. Christian churches that seek to foster community for its own sake can tend to become devoted primarily to the benefits and pleasures of belonging to a certain group of likeminded people. In turn, those who carry differing perspectives or who challenge the status quo, even when unvirtuous or questionable activity is on display, can become demonized as dissenters with “divisive spirits.” In contrast, Aristotelian friendships are singly devoted to the open display of righteous living and not a socially defined or contrived contract to experience “unity.” The focus on Christlike character formation tends to be forgotten in communities where belonging becomes more important than becoming. For Christian leaders, having friends of virtue who are willing to pay the price for maintaining the priority of becoming more Christlike cannot be overemphasized.²⁴

Of course, there are more spiritual disciplines and practices that will do wonders for character development. To name just a few, the discipline of secrecy carries great benefits for those in the public eye. For the more extroverted leader, the disciplines of solitude and silence are fundamental to best overcome the trappings of fame and self-importance. For those with more introverted personalities, perhaps the disciplines of fellowship and celebration may be a welcome means of coming out of a shell of isolation that many leaders struggle to escape. And there are many more. Still, the first steps in the process of developing a robust commitment to holistic wellness begins best, in my view, with first deciding personal moral character is not a luxury but a necessity that demands a keen level of devotion and commitment.

The appropriate disciplines are chosen and practiced after we have discovered where we need to grow. For instance, if a person is struggling to keep their opinions to themselves, or if a leader tends to be a bit overbearing and controlling, the disciplines of fasting and silence may be helpful in combating such tendencies. Or, if a leader has a tendency to be standoffish and isolated, the disciplines of fellowship and celebration can

often do wonders in helping to reconnect the leader to their team and establishing a sense of camaraderie. It is important to note that spiritual disciplines help us practice “off the spot” what character trait we desire to display when we are “on the spot.” Just as athletes spend thousands of hours practicing hitting baseballs or shooting jump shots before the game ever begins, so too leaders must practice embodying the characteristics of godliness necessary for their callings as well. Finally, every leader, just like each athlete, will have some natural tendencies for success in some areas and struggles in others. What the disciplines provide is a means of discovering, then working to improve, areas of improvement long before they manifest in moments that count. Here again, good friends will commit to discussing, evaluating, and then developing strategies to address what the disciplines reveals.

A Rule of Life

With a commitment to the disciplined life established, leaders must then resolve within themselves to focus on the areas of weakness in character or lack of maturity in their spiritual development. For some this might produce what historic Christians down through the ages have termed a Rule of Life.²⁵ Simply defined, a Rule of Life is a set of resolutions and commitments one makes that provide a structure and direction for growth in spiritual wholeness. A rule attempts to establish “a rhythm for life in which is helpful for being formed by the Spirit, a rhythm that reflects a love for God and respect for how he has made us.”²⁶ Prayerfully developing a Rule of Life, in partnership with good friends, seeking the good life in God’s kingdom together is an excellent way leaders can endeavor to follow the greatest commandment to love God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength, while seeking to love others as Christ has loved us.

Again, spiritual disciplines combined with a Rule of Life are a means only, not the end. The disciplines themselves are not a form of righteousness. One is not spiritually mature because they routinely engage the disciplines of fasting, solitude, silence, or giving. What is unfortunately often overlooked by Christian leaders is taking time to evaluate the effects the disciplines do or do not have on one's life. Like all disciplines, whether physical disciplines applied in athletics, playing musical instruments, or medical procedures, or when engaging mental disciplines applied to academic studies or writing, disciplined practices are intended to create an increasing degree of ease in the activity being engaged. One practices their musical scales in order to become better adept at playing music. Likewise, the effects of our spiritual disciplines in a Rule of Life need to be measured and adapted when necessary to attain full effect. One is not mature or righteous simply because spiritual disciplines are practiced. We often misplace our focus on what it is the disciplines are. They are tools, not guarantees or rewards — means of grace and not meritorious for salvation. True friends will help us keep these priorities in line and assist us in tracking our progress as they journey with us and we with them. If these important steps are taken, good things tend to happen because God is not willing that any should perish.

In conclusion, I desperately want to find evidences in our Christian leaders to disprove Kellerman and Moore's thesis. I find myself often asking what if the media were given unlimited access to the lives of Christian leaders who have willingly submitted themselves to the rigors of moral character formation described in the New Testament as the discipleship program of Jesus? What would be the result? What if, under the microscope of scrutiny, the media found not perfect people, but authentically genuine, moral, courageous, altruistic, loving, merciful, and ruthlessly honest individuals who know and do good for those they serve? What kind of witness would that be to an increasingly cynical post-Christian society?

A tragic example of courageous moral leadership can be found in the midst of a horrific and recent sexual abuse scandal involving Larry Nassar. Olympic gymnast Rachael Denhollander was the first of many to file a police complaint against Nassar, her former doctor, for sexual assault when she was 15. It was later reported that Nassar may have been responsible for sexual crimes with over 150 women, many of which were minors.²⁷ In a courageously honest op-ed in The New York Times, Denhollander offered some perspective on the hardships she has faced as a result of her decision to expose Nassar and her willingness to advocate for other victims of his crimes:

I lost my church. I lost my closest friends as a result of advocating for survivors who had been victimized by similar institutional failures in my own community. I lost every shred of privacy. When a new friend searched my name online or added me as a friend on Facebook, the most intimate details of my life became available long before we had even exchanged phone numbers. I avoided the grocery stores on some days, to make sure my children didn't see my face on the newspaper or a magazine. I was asked questions about things no one should know when I least wanted to talk. And the effort it took to move this case forward — especially as some called me an “ambulance chaser” just “looking for a payday” — often felt crushing.

Yet all of it served as a reminder: These were the very cultural dynamics that had allowed Larry Nassar to remain in power. I knew that the farthest I could run from my abuser, and the people that let him prey on children for decades, was to choose the opposite of what that man, and his enablers, had become. To choose to find and speak the truth, no matter what it cost.²⁸

At Nassar's sentencing hearing, Denhollander made this courageous statement:

The Bible you speak of carries a final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you.

Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you. I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt, so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me — though I extend that to you as well.

Throughout this process, I have clung to a quote by C.S. Lewis, where he says, my argument against God was that the universe seems so cruel and unjust. But how did I get this idea of just, unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he first has some idea of straight. What was I comparing the universe to when I called it unjust?

Larry, I can call what you did evil and wicked because it was. And I know it was evil and wicked because the straight line exists. The straight line is not measured based on your perception or anyone else's perception, and this means I can speak the truth about my abuse without minimization or mitigation. And I can call it evil because I know what goodness is. And this is why I pity you. Because when a person loses the ability to define good and evil, when they cannot define evil, they can no longer define and enjoy what is truly good.²⁹

Unfortunately, too few of our contemporary Christian leaders today have accepted the call of moral leadership and character formation that Denhollander exemplifies. But what if we did? What if our leaders decided to engage in exactly the kind of moral inventory Denhollander describes and look into our own lives to discern what is crooked and what is strait? Then what if investigative teams did deep dive background checks into the lives of these disciples of Jesus and discovered real virtue instead of vice? What if the public was routinely confronted with widely published evidences of incontrovertible acts of moral courage, integrity, faithfulness, familial loyalty, graciousness, generosity, self-sacrifice, gentle patience, a fierce devotion to truth, a glowing respect for the intrinsic value of all persons, and a keen

awareness of the differences between one's personal good and the common good? What if we had these same kinds of moral leaders in the fields of journalism that endeavored to put these kinds of credible testimonials before the public eye? Would leadership be dead then? Or would we be able to demonstrate once again how indefatigably necessary moral courage and visionary leadership is to our society? I argue the world is looking for and needs heroes today as much if not more than ever before. And the church should be full of heroes. It was once. There was a time the church was a hero factory. It must be again.

Our leaders must be held accountable. We must ask ourselves and our leaders, "Who are your friends of virtue? Who has the permission to ask you hard questions without fear of reprisal and has given you permission for the same? Who tracks your progress and comments on your regression? Who are you revealing the complexities of your soul to? Who knows about your secret successes and failures? Who have you let in? How are you intentionally seeking spiritual wholeness?" If we read these questions as good advice or interesting thoughts and yet cease to act, we become complacent. And the world continues to groan, waiting for the sons and daughter of God to be revealed. We, and they, deserve better. And God has provided exactly what we need to live in the holistic flourishing and wholeness originally intended in the Garden. That reality still exists. And we don't have to die to experience it. Life from above is available now. In fact, Jesus stated it is "at hand," within our reach (Matt 3:2, 4:17). Glory to God.

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God," (Rom 8:19-21).

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