

THE BIGGEST TRAP IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

JEANNE MAYO

A. Very common leadership sentiments/realities I hear often:

1. "If people really knew how infrequent and lame my own personal devotional life is, I would be kicked out of the ministry! (At least, I SHOULD be.)"
2. "NUMBERS seem to be the big deal to my pastor...and true intimacy with Jesus is rarely (if ever) focused on from a leadership perspective. What gets rewarded at our church is numbers and platform performance."
3. "I often feel very FROZEN and distant from the Lord...but no one seems to notice or even care."

B. Let's start today off with a little challenge. Read over the Scriptures I've listed and see what simple, repeating fact emerges from all of them. I promise. It's important or I wouldn't take you through this drill.

1. Matthew 14:23, *"After Jesus had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone."*
2. Luke 9:18, *"And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples came to join Him."*
3. Matthew 26:36, *"Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'"*
4. Mark 1:35, *"In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place to pray."*
5. Luke 9:29, *"And while Jesus was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming."*
6. Matthew 26:39, *"And Jesus went a little beyond them, and He fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.'"*
7. Luke 22:39-41, *"And Jesus went to the Mount of Olives and His disciples also followed Him. When He arrived at the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And He withdrew from them the distance of about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray..."*

8. OK, did you finish your little drill? Let's do a multiple-choice question to get the answer: The repeating theme in Jesus' life we see here is:

- a. Jesus didn't like people so He stayed away from them.
- b. Jesus seemed to have trouble with balance so He often, "fell on His face."
- c. Jesus was on a diet because He told the Father to let "the cup pass" (for weight loss purposes).
- d. Jesus MADE TIME to pray...no matter what was going on or how tough life became.**

C. RATHER THAN DEAL WITH THE OBVIOUS...LET ME TRY TO HELP US IN A MORE LASTING WAY. I'm going to focus on A COUPLE OF THE PRIMARY REASONS WHY WE ALL, FROM TIME TO TIME, STRUGGLE WITH GENUINELY KEEPING JESUS #1.

1. Let me ask you a key question that relates to this on-going war: **Are you a "JESUS AND" person?** Let me explain:

- a. You see, almost all of us would quickly say that the answer to eternal life is FAITH IN CHRIST.
- b. But unconsciously, along our faith journey, we begin to think that **SOMETHING ELSE needs to be ADDED to KEEP US in good standing with Jesus.**
- c. C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* talks about this as one of the Devil's biggest traps in our lives. Screwtape trains his satanic protégé on a trap he calls, **"Faith in Jesus AND..."**
 - Faith in Jesus AND our achievements
 - Faith in Jesus AND a great family
 - Faith in Jesus AND our reputation
 - Faith in Jesus AND our prosperity
 - Faith in Jesus AND a thriving, growing ministry
 - Faith in Jesus AND being accepted by certain people
 - Finish the phrase any way you want!

2. Let me share with you the end result of this "FAITH IN CHRIST **AND**" way of living.

- a. Remember the story in Luke 16:18-31 of the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man in the Scripture is never given an ACTUAL NAME...though church tradition has often called him, “a wealthy man.”
- But as Jesus shares the parable in Luke 16, **CHRIST GIVES THE GUY ABSOLUTELY NO NAME. None.**
 - This guy in Luke 16 apparently built his life and identity around the “ground zero of MONEY—FINANCIAL SUCCESS”...one that ultimately failed him in death and left him with NOTHINGNESS.
- b. Meanwhile, there’s a huge contrast to this NAMELESS rich guy in Luke 16. Maybe you’ve never looked at it like this before. It’s the beggar named, LAZARUS.
- But catch this: Jesus immediately CALLS THIS BEGGAR GUY BY NAME. That’s a big deal.
 - See, while Lazarus was on earth, he sure didn’t have much of the stuff we all easily seek. I mean, Lazarus was a beggar who just sat around...day in and day out at the rich man’s gate...begging. And to make matters worse, Lazarus was so sick that the Bible says that DOGS LICKED THE SORES THAT COVERED HIS ENTIRE BODY.
 - But in eternity, Lazarus is immediately carried by the angels to Father Abraham. While the NAMELESS rich guy was carried instead to “a place of eternal TORMENT.” Even when the rich man calls out in his agony, begging for mercy, Father Abraham doesn’t address him by name either. He just calls him “**child.**”
- c. This unnamed rich guy from Luke 16 anchored his identity in his accomplishments, his wealth, and his stuff—making them his IDOLS. **And the end-result?**
- **In eternity to Jesus...he made himself only a NAMELESS FACE who didn’t even have a TRUE SPIRITUAL IDENTITY.**
- d. * All our IDOLATRY heads us down the same EMPTY path of **eternal no-name-ness.**

- Let me say that again. This one statement is worth the whole session...if you'll just let your heart hear it deeply:
- All our IDOLATRY heads us each down the same EMPTY path of **eternal no-name-ness.**

e. So, what are you internally trying to find fulfillment in that is OUTSIDE OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST?

- The prouder or less transparent ones among us may be glibly saying, "This really doesn't relate to me. I've already got this HANDLED. Jesus already is my absolute and complete internal 'Ground Zero' in every arena of my life."
- **BUT IS HE REALLY? Or like many of us, almost unconsciously, do you really have "Jesus AND" faith?**

3. Most of my fight to keep Jesus really #1 comes out of what I'm calling, my own PERSONAL "ADDICTIONS." So, let me ask you a question you've maybe never thought much about. **WHAT'S YOUR "EMOTIONAL ADDICTION"?**

a. MINE? That's easy. It's embarrassing to admit...but I know its name: "THE DISEASE TO PLEASE." I want you to LIKE me. It probably was born out of being raised in a non-Christian family that wasn't particularly affluent or outstanding. I still mentally "shake my head" over all the gymnastics I went through in Middle School and High School to get people to LIKE ME.

- Maybe you privately deal with a very different INTERNAL ADDICTION. Maybe it's one of the more common ones like WORKAHOLISM or PERFECTIONISM. Maybe YOUR ADDICTION is to PERFORMANCE... or FOOD...or DRINKING or DRUGS...or PORN...or the LONGING FOR BELONG...or THINGS and FINANCIAL TOYS or BEING THOUGHT COOL or FUNNY...or WHATEVER!

b. Listen to the haunting words of Contemporary Billionaire, Warren Spector, **"The loneliest moment in life is right after you've experienced what you thought to be the ULTIMATE in happiness...and then you suddenly realize THAT IT JUST LET YOU DOWN."**

c. So, let me bring you back to my earlier statement: **Most of our fight to keep Jesus #1 is born out of our own INTERNAL ADDICTIONS. What's yours?**

- Let me “drill down” a little more on that question: **What are you missing in life that prompts you to go after that particular addiction?**
 - Are you tracking with me? Let me ask it a different way: **What are you really after...at your deepest core level?**
 - o It might be a sense of success
 - o Acceptance or approval
 - o A sense a family
 - o The healing of a father-wound
 - That’s what it is for me. My dad was a good man. But remember...“Parents are just kids who grew up and had kids.” So, a close-up look at the relationship with my dad would have revealed some pretty big “cracks.”
- d. Look, I’m not trying to be “Dr. Phil”...but if I choose to purposefully come OFF THE LEADERSHIP PEDESTAL and let you know that I haven’t DEFEATED all that junk myself, that I’m still a “work in progress,” then Jesus and I can give you something pretty MAGICAL. **It’s called HOPE!** Hebrews 6:19 and Romans 5:5 tell me that *“Hope is the ANCHOR of the soul...and that HOPE makes us not to be ASHAMED!”*
- So, let’s give that question another shot: **Most of our warfare to keep Jesus #1 is born out of our own INTERNAL/EMOTIONAL ADDICTIONS. What’s yours?**
- e. And even more importantly, **what are you missing in life that prompts you to go after that addiction?** As a matter of fact, let’s POLL the crowd and see what comes up. Let me first tell you five general options, at least one of which will apply to most of us. Then you can privately make your own personal decision:

What are you missing in life that prompts you to go after your internal addiction?

- A sense of FAMILY
- A sense of SIGNIFICANCE
- FORGIVENESS/FREEDOM
- PURPOSE
- Being DEEPLY LOVED

- f. Here's the bottom line: Where's the restlessness, the internal drive, or maybe the fear really coming from? **Answer that question and you're well on your way to DEFEATING THE ENEMY'S GAME PLAN in your life to destroy your own personal intimacy with Christ.**
- I can't tell you how many THOUSANDS of times in my own life I've quoted back to myself Colossians 2:10, "*I am COMPLETE in Him.*"
 - My desire to have people approve of me...the insecurities that come from being raised on the "wrong side of the tracks"...the sense that I'm never quite good enough...all that stuff SHOULD have completely evaporated by now in the face of that biblical truth, "*I am COMPLETE in Him.*"
 - But has it all totally and permanently been conquered, really? I'm sorry to say not. Oh, it's sure gotten a million times better...much more manageable...and I've gotten much more aware. I know how to fight it now. But I still have to "pick up the sword" more often than I'd like to admit and use the Word of God to fight the mind-games and emotional garbage off.
 - Yet before you judge me too harshly...I think we've all got some emotional garbage we still occasionally fight. Maybe you just haven't stopped long enough to allow the Lord to put a spotlight on them.
 - That's why this sharing can be a GAME CHANGER for you. Believe me... PRAYERFUL INTROSPECTION AND HONESTY can change the trajectory of your **WHOLE SPIRITUAL LIFE!**
 - At the risk of sounding melodramatic, the stakes are pretty high for many of us.
- g. Martin Luther once said, **"Whatever your heart continues to seek after, that is really your God—your FUNCTIONAL SAVIOR."**
- h. John Calvin famously said, **"All of our human hearts are, at their core, IDOL-MAKING FACTORIES."**
- i. Man, those famous old guys were smart!
- **So let me ask you one more time: What are you really after at your deepest core?**

- o Approval, acceptance, intimacy, family, forgiveness, purpose, peace, freedom... What is it?
- **Answer that question...and you're well on your way to unraveling what often fights to take CENTER STAGE over Jesus Christ really being #1 in your life.**

D. CONCLUDING STORY:

Let me conclude today's sharing with an awesome story. It's about an old man who was dying of cancer. The man's daughter asked the local priest to come and pray with her father. When the priest arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair right beside him. The priest glanced at the chair and assumed the old guy was waiting for his visit.

"I guess you were expecting me," the priest said kindly. "No, actually not," the old man said with embarrassment. "Will you forgive me and tell me your name? The medicine they give me for pain has really messed up my memory."

"Please don't feel embarrassed," the priest replied. "You're not supposed to know my name. I'm the new associate at your parish. When I saw the empty chair, I just figured you knew I was going to show up."

"Oh yeah, the chair," said the man quietly. "Would you mind closing the door? I'd love to share my secret with you. After all, you are my priest now." Puzzled, the priest shut the old man's door and sat down to hear what he was going to say next.

"You see," the old man said, "I've never told anyone this before, not even my daughter. But all my life I could never figure out how to pray. At Sunday mass I used to hear the priest talk about prayer, but it always confused me. I didn't feel like my prayers ever did any good. So, I finally gave up praying altogether."

"Then about five years ago," the old man continued, "my best friend said, 'Joe, prayer is just like talking to me, your best friend. I've got a suggestion for you. Why don't you sit down in a chair and place an empty chair in front of you? By faith, picture Jesus sitting in that chair and then start talking to Him. That's what prayer is. It's having a conversation with Jesus. It's not weird or anything because Jesus promises in the Bible, 'I'll be with you always.' All you have to do,

Joe, is talk to Him and listen back the same way you're doing with me right now.”

“So, I tried it,” Joe proudly announced to the young priest. “And it's changed everything! As a matter of fact, I like it so much that now I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter ever saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd think the medicines were getting to me! So, let's just keep this our little secret.”

The priest was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old man to continue on his personal prayer journey. Before leaving, he prayed with Joe, anointed him with oil, and returned to the church. Two nights later, the man's daughter called to tell the priest that her father had died that afternoon and they would like his help in getting everything together for the funeral ceremony

“Did he seem to die in peace?” the priest asked lovingly. “Yes,” his daughter answered. “When I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his old jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange, Father. In fact, really strange. Apparently, just before Dad died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed. Crazy, isn't it? Somehow he had a strange attraction to that old chair.”

As a believer, you have an incredible opportunity! Every day you can have a personal conversation with the God of all gods, the King of all kings. Try the “10 & 10.” Schedule in an “appointment time” with Him each day when it will be easy to develop a habit of consistency. Then pull up a chair and start the conversation! He's been waiting to hear from you. Even more, when you get lonely or times get tough, just learn to PUT YOUR SPIRITUAL HEAD ON HIS LAP. It's the safest place in the universe to rest.

E. POSSIBLE LEADER-TO-LEADER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Good leaders realize the importance of occasionally “taking care of each other.” So please, make sure you do that in these next few minutes. Let’s divide up into teams of two. Both of you answer each question one at a time. Then go to the next question. Please be sure to take a minute to pray together at the ending.

1. What’s your own “emotional addiction”? Jeanne said hers was “the disease to please.” Maybe yours is perfectionism...OR the longing for belonging...OR performance...OR lustful fantasy and porn...OR materialism...OR whatever.
2. What are you missing in life that prompts you to go after that particular addiction?

Let me ask it a different way: What are you really after at your deepest core level? It might be a sense of success...OR acceptance OR approval...a sense a family...OR the healing of a father-wound...OR something else. WHAT ARE YOU REALLY “EMOTIONALLY HUNGRY FOR”...at your deepest level? A few of the most common include:

- A sense of family
- A sense of significance
- Forgiveness/freedom
- Purpose
- Being deeply and unconditionally loved

So, whatever your answer is, share with each other what you think you’re really after at your deepest level.

THE ANSWERS TO THESE TWO QUESTIONS TELL YOU A LOT ABOUT WHAT CAN QUIETLY PUSH JESUS OUT OF “GROUND ZERO” IN YOUR HEART.

3. Finish this phrase: When I allow myself to become a “JESUS AND” person...the thing that most easily gets added to the equation is...
 - Almost all of us would say FAITH IN CHRIST...
 - But unconsciously, along our faith journey, we begin to think that SOMETHING ELSE needs to be ADDED to KEEP US in good standing with Jesus.

- C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* talks about this as one of the Devil's biggest traps in our lives. Screwtape trains his satanic protégé on a trap he calls "Faith in Christ AND..."
- Faith in Christ AND our achievements...Faith in Christ AND a great family... Faith in Christ AND our reputation...Faith in Christ AND our prosperity... Faith in Christ AND a thriving ministry...Finish the phrase any way you want!

4. As a fellow leader and Christ-follower, the thing(s) you can do to most help me keep Jesus "as the center of it all" is...

5. PLEASE DON'T SPLIT UP UNTIL YOU BRIEFLY PRAY TOGETHER.

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8. Let's do a multiple-choice question to get the answer: The repeating theme in Jesus' life we see here is:
 - a. Jesus didn't like people so He stayed away from them.
 - b. Jesus seemed to have trouble with balance so He often, "fell on His face."
 - c. Jesus was on a diet because He told the Father to let "the cup pass" (for weight loss purposes).
 - d. **Jesus _____ to pray...no matter what was going on or how tough life became.**

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1. Let me ask you a key question that relates to this on-going war: **Are you a**
“ _____ ” **person?** Let me explain:
 - a. You see, almost all of us would quickly say that the answer to eternal life is FAITH IN CHRIST.
 - b. But unconsciously, along our faith journey, we begin to think that **SOMETHING ELSE needs to be ADDED to KEEP US in** _____
_____ **with Jesus.**
 - c. C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* talks about this as one of the Devil's biggest traps in our lives. Screwtape trains his satanic protégé on a trap he calls, **“Faith in Jesus AND...”**
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 - Finish the phrase any way you want!
2. Let me share with you the end result of this “FAITH IN CHRIST **AND**” way of living.
 - a. Remember the story in Luke 16:18-31 of the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man in the Scripture is never given an ACTUAL NAME...though church tradition has often called him, “a wealthy man.”
 - But as Jesus shares the parable in Luke 16, **CHRIST GIVES THE GUY ABSOLUTELY** _____.
 - This guy in Luke 16 apparently built his life and identity around the “ground zero of MONEY—FINANCIAL SUCCESS”...one that ultimately failed him in death and left him with NOTHINGNESS.
 - b. Meanwhile, there's a huge contrast to this NAMELESS rich guy in Luke 16. Maybe you've never looked at it like this before. It's the beggar named, _____.

- But catch this: Jesus immediately CALLS THIS BEGGAR GUY BY NAME. That's a big deal.
- See, while Lazarus was on earth, he sure didn't have much of the stuff we all easily seek. I mean, Lazarus was a beggar who just sat around...day in and day out at the rich man's gate...begging. And to make matters worse, Lazarus was so sick that the Bible says that DOGS LICKED THE SORES THAT COVERED HIS ENTIRE BODY.
- But in eternity, Lazarus is immediately carried by the angels to Father Abraham. While the NAMELESS rich guy was carried instead to "a place of eternal TORMENT." Even when the rich man calls out in his agony, begging for mercy, Father Abraham doesn't address him by name either. He just calls him "**child.**"

c. This unnamed rich guy from Luke 16 anchored his identity in his accomplishments, his wealth, and his stuff—making them his IDOLS. **And the end-result?**

- **In eternity to Jesus...he made himself only a _____ who didn't even have a _____ IDENTITY.**

d. All our IDOLATRY heads us down the same EMPTY path of **eternal no-name-ness.**

e. So, what are you internally trying to find fulfillment in that is OUTSIDE OF YOUR _____ WITH CHRIST?

3. Most of my fight to keep Jesus really #1 comes out of what I'm calling, my own PERSONAL "ADDICTIONS." So let me ask you a question you've maybe never thought much about. **WHAT'S YOUR " _____ "?**

- a. Maybe it's one of the more common ones like WORKAHOLISM or PERFECTIONISM. Maybe YOUR ADDICTION is to PERFORMANCE...or FOOD...or DRINKING or DRUGS...or PORN...or the LONGING FOR BELONG...or THINGS and FINANCIAL TOYS or BEING THOUGHT COOL or FUNNY...or WHATEVER!

- b. **“The loneliest moment in life is right after you’ve experienced what you thought to be the _____ in happiness...and then you suddenly realize THAT IT JUST LET YOU DOWN.”** –Contemporary Billionaire, Warren Spector
- c. So let me bring you back to my earlier statement: **Most of our fight to keep Jesus #1 is born out of our own _____.** **What’s yours?**
- **What are you missing in life that prompts you to go after that particular addiction?**
 - **What are you really after...at your deepest core level?**
 - It might be a sense of success
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- d. If I choose to purposefully come OFF THE LEADERSHIP PEDESTAL and let you know that I haven’t DEFEATED all that junk myself, that I’m still a “work in progress,” then Jesus and I can give you something pretty MAGICAL. **It’s called HOPE!** Hebrews 6:19 and Romans 5:5 tell me that *“Hope is the ANCHOR of the soul...and that HOPE makes us not to be ASHAMED!”*
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- Colossians 2:10, "*I am _____ in Him.*"
- PRAYERFUL INTROSPECTION AND HONESTY can change the trajectory of your **WHOLE SPIRITUAL LIFE!**

g. **"Whatever your heart continues to seek after, that is really your God—your _____ SAVIOR."** —Martin Luther

h. "All of our human hearts are, at their core, _____ - _____." —John Calvin

i. **So, let me ask you one more time: What are you really after at your deepest core?**

- Approval, acceptance, intimacy, family, forgiveness, purpose, peace, freedom... What is it?
- **Answer that question...and you're well on your way to unraveling what often fights to take _____ over Jesus Christ really being #1 in your life.**

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5. PLEASE DON’T SPLIT UP UNTIL YOU BRIEFLY PRAY TOGETHER.

Answers:

MADE TIME; JESUS AND; good standing; NO NAME; LAZARUS; NAMELESS FACE; TRUE SPIRITUAL; RELATIONSHIP; EMOTIONAL ADDICTION; ULTIMATE; INTERNAL ADDICTIONS; ENEMY'S GAMEPLAN; COMPLETE; FUNCTIONAL; IDOL-MAKING FACTORIES; CENTER STAGE