



THE PRACTICES OF A HEALTHY LEADER

Episode Three: The Curious Case of the People-Pleasing Leader

EPISODE SUMMARY

Every leader wants to be liked, respected, and trusted. The problem begins when wanting approval becomes needing it. In this episode, Brad and Rick explore how people-pleasing can quietly turn leadership from stewardship into emotional management. What often looks like kindness, empathy, or patience may actually be an attempt to avoid the discomfort of disappointing someone. Healthy leaders learn to distinguish between someone feeling hurt and actually harming someone, allowing them to remain caring without assuming responsibility for everyone else's emotions. Our worth and security are received from God; our leadership is something we offer. When that order gets reversed, we give away our ability to lead.

REFLECTION

Where are you currently delaying a decision you already know needs to be made?

If you took other people's reactions completely out of the equation, how convinced are you that you know the right decision?

Complete this sentence as honestly as possible: *If I make this decision and people are disappointed, angry, hurt, or leave, that means _____ about me.*

What does your answer reveal about what you are trying to protect?

Brad and Rick distinguish between someone feeling hurt by you and you actually hurting them. How easily do you confuse another person's disappointment or discomfort with evidence that you've done something wrong?

People-pleasing can be understood as a form of "disordered love." Think about a recent situation in which you avoided conflict, softened necessary feedback, delayed a decision, or tried to keep everyone happy. Who were you actually protecting or loving in that moment?

Rick describes "compassionate, courageous curiosity" as the willingness to give ourselves grace while still pursuing the truth about what's happening inside us.

Who in your life can ask you the hard questions when you aren't sure whether your patience is actually wisdom or avoidance?



THE PRACTICE GUIDE

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SIT IN THE DISAPPOINTMENT

Leadership inevitably requires decisions that disappoint people. The goal of this practice is not to become detached or uncaring. It is to learn that you can care deeply about someone's response without taking responsibility for managing it.

Sometime in the next 30 days, identify a decision, difficult conversation, or piece of necessary feedback that you know may disappoint someone. Make the decision or have the conversation, and then practice these three disciplines:

1) Don't Fix It

Communicate the decision clearly. Resist the urge to immediately soften it, minimize it, or find some way to keep the other person from being disappointed.

2) Don't Defend It

You don't have to convince everyone to agree with you. Resist the urge to over-explain simply because someone's disagreement makes you uncomfortable.

3) Don't Rescue Them

Allow the other person to have their own emotional response. Their disappointment, frustration, or disagreement does not automatically mean you've done something wrong. You can acknowledge what they're experiencing without taking responsibility for fixing it:

"I understand this is hard. I care about you, and I care about what we're doing, but I believe this is the right path."

Then let it be.

Remember: The goal isn't to care less. It's to learn to **care without carrying what isn't yours to carry**. Healthy leaders remain compassionate and connected while allowing other people to take responsibility for their own emotions. Over time, sitting in that discomfort strengthens our capacity to make courageous decisions without surrendering our leadership to the approval of others.