

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP
And the Type of Person God Uses
Purpose Driven Church Conference
Rick Warren

“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” Heb. 13:7

The common denominator of all growing churches:

Leadership that is _____

Four ways The “Faith Factor” is Seen in Leadership

1. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO _____

Nothing happens until someone:

A church never outgrows:

You cannot delegate:

GOALS ARE:

Pr. 11:7 (GN); Isa 54:2-3

Ask: What would I attempt for God if: _____

“God... is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of – infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes!” Eph. 3:20 (LB)

Two common mistakes we make in goal setting:

- We set them:
- We try to reach them:

Overestimate – 1 year Underestimate – 10 years.

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What to consider when setting growth goals:

1. How _____ do I intend to _____ ?
2. How many people
3. What are my

Three parts To Getting God's Vision

- First, God shows you _____
- Next, God shows you _____
- Then, God shows you _____

Stop praying: Lord bless _____

Instead pray: Help me to do _____

II. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO _____

Acts 15:26 *"They risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (NIV)

Matt. 25 – "Unfaithful" means

Three Approaches to Ministry

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Satan's greatest tool against pastors:
Prov. 29:25

Two Ways to Eliminate It

1.

2.

"Each man should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to someone else." Gal. 6:4

Goals should be based on what we believe _____
not what we think we can do.

You haven't really believed God until you've:

III. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO _____

The difference between winners & losers:

Matt. 9:29 *"According to your faith it will be done to you."*

Never let an impossible situation intimidate you.

Let it:

Satan's favorite words:

Today's impossible problem is:

Expect people to help you!
Big thinking:

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IV. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO _____

Luke 9:62

Great people are just ordinary people who:

Gal. 6:9

- You are never a failure until:
- It's always too soon to:

"Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again!" Prov. 24:16

How Do Humility and Big Goals Go Together?

1. You'll be
2. You will have problems that are
3. You'll make
4. The dream will be so big, you're bound to fail unless
5. Others will take credit for your work

THE ISSUE OF CONFIDENCE

Everything God does in us, for us, and through us, He does by grace through faith.
See. Eph. 2:8-9; Col 2:6

GRACE:

FAITH: What are you expecting God to do in your ministry?

The one thing we do have control over:

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him." 2 Chron. 16:9

"For after David had served God's purpose in his generation, he died." Acts 13:36

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PERSONAL APPLICATION WORK SHEET

1. What would you attempt for God if you had the resources and you knew you couldn't fail?

2. What would be the first steps you would take to reach that goal?

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For the past 25 years, I have been studying what is it that makes churches grow. Why is it that some churches kind of explode with growth and keep right on growing? And other churches, where the people are just as sincere and just as dedicated and just as godly, to just have minor growth is a major victory? Why is it while in some churches the folks are just as committed to Jesus Christ and they love the Lord and they're faithful to His word that the church is struggling, plateaued or its declining?

I'm often asked, "Is there any single common denominator that you can find in every growing church?" I have studied churches for many years, read about them, visited them and really God uses all kinds of churches, in all kinds of different ways, all different methods and styles. But there is one common denominator that you can find in every growing church regardless of denomination, regardless of nationality, regardless of size.

That common denominator is leadership that is not afraid to believe God. I call it the faith factor. Leadership that is not afraid to believe God. Everything rises or falls on leadership.

In this session I want us to look at four ways that faith is demonstrated, four ways that leaders can demonstrate faith in their personal lives and in the lives of those around them.

1. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO HAS A DREAM.

A vision, a dream, a goal. Nothing starts happening until somebody starts dreaming. Every accomplishment started off first as an idea in somebody's mind. It started off as a dream. It started off as a vision, a goal. If you don't have a goal for your church, your goal is a goal by default and it is the goal to remain the same. If you aim at nothing you're going to hit it.

A church without a vision is never going to grow. A church's vision will never be larger than the vision of its pastor. So you as a leader and as a pastor, must have God's vision for your church. It is the very first task of leadership – set the vision for the organization. If you don't set the vision, you're not the leader. Whoever is establishing the vision in your church is the leader of that particular church. A church will never outgrow its vision and the vision of a church will never outgrow the vision of the pastor.

If I'm smart I can always compensate for my weaknesses. And I have many of them, just ask my wife, my children, my staff. I've got a lot of weaknesses. If I'm smart I can always hire people to do things or delegate to lay people things that I can't do. If I'm not good at counseling, I can find people who are good at counseling. If I'm not good at administration and details I can find people to do administration and details.

But there is one thing I cannot delegate. I cannot ask other people to believe God for me. I have to set the pace in terms of vision, in terms of dreams, in terms of faith, in terms of what God wants to do in our lives and in our congregation. You cannot delegate faith in God.

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Goals are simply statements of faith. When you set a goal, you're saying, "I believe God wants to accomplish "this" thing by "this" time. A statement of faith. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 11:27 (Good News translation) *"If your goals are good you will be respected."*

So I want to challenge you to dream great dreams for God. One nice thing about dreaming is it doesn't cost anything. You can have great dreams and think through and pray through and it doesn't cost you anything at all. The Bible says *"God is able to do far more than anything we would ever dare to ask or even dream of, infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts or hopes."* Ephesians 3:20 (Living Bible). That's an amazing verse. It says God is able to do beyond what you can dream of. I don't know about you but I'm a pretty big dreamer. I can think up some pretty big things and some pretty big dreams. I can set some pretty big goals. God comes along and says, "Think up the biggest thing you think I can do in your life, in your ministry, in your church and I can top that. I can beat it."

So you need to ask yourself this question, "What would I attempt for God if I knew I couldn't fail? Let that expand your horizons. Let it expand your dreams. Expand your vision. It starts with a dream.

There are two common mistakes we make in goal setting. One of them is we try to set them too low and we try to accomplish them too quickly. We overestimate what we can do in a year. We underestimate what we can do in ten years or fifteen years or twenty years. I told you in a previous session that when I began Saddleback church, I prayed to the Lord and I got out a big map of the world and said, "I'll go anyplace in the world if You'll just give me the privilege of spending my entire life in one location." I thought, what could happen if I were to invest my life – maybe forty years – in one place. When you commit yourself to a place for forty years, you can dream pretty big. If you're just going to stay around for a little while you can't have very big dreams. But if you say, "Lord, I'm going to give the rest of my life to this place," you can think bigger than you've ever dreamed before. You take it a little bit at a time. It's like the cliché, "How do you eat an elephant?" One bit at a time. Inch by inch anything is a cinch. If you're willing to stay, you can do some great things.

This is the age of church growth. The largest and the strongest churches that have ever existed in the history of the world are in existence right now. They happen to not be in America. They're in Korea, South America, Africa. There's a church in Nigeria that runs 80,000. There's a church in Chile that runs 250,000. There's a church in Seoul, Korea that has 750,000 members. There are four or five or six churches in Seoul, Korea that run more than 30,000. I've spoken in several of those churches. This is the age of church growth.

But I believe that the greatest churches have yet to be built. It may just be that God will choose one of you or a group of you in the auditorium here today to say, "You're the next wave. You are the person that I'm going to lay My hands on and I'm going to use to show the world My might and My power and My greatness." But I guarantee you, it won't be you unless you get a dream. Unless you get a vision from God and you start and you say, "God, what do You want to do with my life?"

How big should your goal be when you're growing a church, planning a church? There are a couple of questions you need to ask yourself. You need to ask first, how many people live in this

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ministry area when you're considering your growth goals. How many people live in the area? Obviously if you're in a town of 1000 you're not going to set a goal of 10,000.

But the first and most important question you need to ask is, How long do I intend to stay here? I had a kid come to me one time who was going to start a new church. He asked me, "What should my goal be?" I said, "How long are you going to stay?" He said, "I'm committed for at least the next six months." I told him, "Don't even go. You're not going to accomplish anything in six months." You must ask yourself, "Am I willing to stay put?" And then you ask, "How many people live in the area?"

The third question you ask is, "What are my spiritual gifts?" You need to have a frank evaluation of how God has shaped you. Am I shaped to minister directly to people? Or am I shaped to minister through other people to people? It's like the difference between being a shepherd (hands on directly with sheep) or a rancher (where you direct shepherds to lead sheep). If your church is going to grow above 300, you have to move from the shepherd mentality to the rancher mentality.

God loves people with a shepherd's heart. He made so many of us with it, to deal personally one-on-one with people. But you have to look at your own spiritual gifts. Then you go out and get alone with God and you get God's vision for your ministry.

There are three parts to getting God's vision for your ministry.

The first thing God shows you is He shows you the What? He shows you what He's going to do. The big mistake is once God has shown you what He's going to do in our lives and our ministries, we immediately run out and figure we can accomplish it in any particular way we wish. So we go out and try to accomplish it on our own power, our own way, in our own efforts. And inevitably we fall flat on our faces. We come crawling back to God. "Oh, God. I'm so sorry. What did I do? Did I miss the vision? You told me what You were going to do and I went out and tried to accomplish it and fell flat on my face. Did I miss the vision?"

And God will say to you, "No, you didn't. You just didn't wait for part two. I told you what I was going to do but you didn't wait to find out How I was going to do it?" When God shows you how it's always in the exact opposite way that you thought. It's not in the way you expected you say, "I'll grow the church this way." And God will say, "No, let's do it this way." Because He wants the glory. And once you see the What and the How you're still not finished. There's a third part of the vision.

God shows you When. The longer that I'm alive and the longer I walk with the Lord and the longer I'm in ministry the more I'm convinced that God's timing is perfect. He is never a minute early, He is never a minute late, He is always right on time. These are the three parts to getting God's vision – What, How and When. And you must wait for all three parts for God to work in your life.

When I started Saddleback church, I didn't envision this enormous campus and this big building. In fact, I'm not a very visual thinker. Some people can see it. They're like artists and they can visualize the church buildings when they're all finished and they can see exactly what it's going to look like in their mind. I've never been that kind of person. I have what I call Polaroid vision.

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Have you ever taken a Polaroid picture? You take it and the longer you look at it the clearer it gets. That's true in my life. When I first came to start this church I didn't know what it was going to end up like. All I knew was that God had called me to this spot and I had a bunch of ideas in a bag and I wanted to build it on the five purposes of God. That's all I knew. As I have walked with the Lord and worked with the Lord over the years, the vision has gotten clearer and clearer.

Kind of like a scroll. When you unroll a scroll, you don't see the whole thing from beginning to end. You just see what's right in front of you. Then you roll it up a little bit and unroll a little bit more. That's the way God's will is in our lives. He doesn't lay out a full plan for your life so you know what's going to happen. If you knew what's going to happen the rest of your life, you'd probably commit suicide. There's some tough points coming up and some turning points and rough edges and some difficulties and some crises that you right now think you couldn't handle. And the truth is you can't. But God's grace is sufficient for each day and when you get there the grace will be there.

So don't borrow trouble. That's why Jesus said, "*Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*" So you get God's vision by saying "What do You want me to do? How do You want me to do it? And When do You want me to do it." You need to stop praying, "God, bless what I'm doing." And instead start praying, "God, help me to do what You're blessing." I get up in the morning and I pray a very similar prayer every day. "God, I know You're going to do some very exciting things in the world today. Would You give me the privilege of just being in on some of them? I just want to be in on what You're doing. I want to do what You're blessing." God uses the person who has a dream.

2. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO IS WILLING TO RISK FAILURE

That's the second evidence of faith in the life of a leader. Saddleback has a history of risk taking. When I moved here to Southern California from Texas I had no money, no members, no building, I didn't no a single person in the Saddleback Valley. But we had just literally moved on faith because God said "go". I gathered a little group of people that I met in shopping centers and next door and down the street and we got about fifteen people eventually meeting in a little Bible study. We went out and used our credit cards and went five or six thousand dollars in debt paying to buy the equipment and to rent the building and do the mail outs and advertising to start the first service. It was an enormous risk. We had no guarantee that we were going to succeed. There was no safety net underneath me. But God uses the person who is willing to risk failure.

I once wondered why God used Paul and Barnabus in such a great way and then I came across this verse, Acts 15:26 "*They risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Circle "risked their lives". Has your ministry required that? Have you ever had to risk your life? Have you ever had to move against your fears? Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is when you move ahead in spite of your fears. Courage is when you do the thing that you fear the most. I have not been a necessarily confident person in each of the major steps that we've moved here at s church. In fact, in many of our major moves and major risks, my life has been filled with fear. But I happen to believe that I base my life not on the fears that I have but what God said to do. So I do what God says to do even if it scares me to death. Do it anyway whether you fear it or not. That is courage. Moving ahead in spite of your fear.

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If you came to my office you'd see a sign in my office, a poster that says, "Leadership is the ability to hide your panic." So you are willing to risk failure.

I've had many people say, "Yes, but God has called us to be faithful, not successful." When I hear that I say, "You're only half right." Because God has called us to be faithful. God has also called us to be fruitful. And all through the New Testament, the theme of fruitfulness is seen.

One day, Jesus walking into Jerusalem sees a barren fruit tree and he curses that fruit tree and later, the next day, they come back and they see that the thing is withered. Why in the world did He do that? Was He just showing off? No, He was doing it to make a point. God expects fruitfulness. The Bible says, "*You have not chosen Me but I have chosen you that you should go and bear forth fruit.*" God expects fruit in our lives. Not just faithfulness but also fruit.

I know that God expects us to be faithful, but I want you to define faithfulness for me. We often define it in a way very different than the way Jesus would define it. We often think faithfulness means being faithful to the word of God, being contenders for the faith, being true to the faith, keeping the faith. We think faithful means believing the right thing. But to Jesus, faithfulness meant far more than just believing the right thing. In Matthew 25 He tells the story of the parable of the talents. The one guy takes his five talents out and doubles it. The other guy takes his ten talents out and doubles it. The risk is there that they could lose it. The third guy takes his one talent and goes, "I'm afraid! I'm afraid to take any risks. I'm afraid of failure. I'm going to bury my talent in the ground. Better safe than sorry. Better to not take any risks." When the master returns he says to that servant, "You wicked, lazy, unfaithful servant!" Why did he call him unfaithful? Because he hadn't taken any risks.

If you're not taking any risks, you don't need any faith. And if you don't need any faith, you are being unfaithful. Unfaithful means knowing what you ought to be doing and not being willing to take the risk to do it. That is unfaithfulness. Being unwilling to risk

There are basically three approaches you can take in your ministry: You can be a risk taker, you can be a caretaker, you can be an undertaker.

You can be a risk taker in your church and go out and risk great things for God. I always say don't be afraid to go out on a limb because that's where the fruit is. Don't be afraid to rock the boat if Jesus Christ is your captain. We've done more things at Saddleback that didn't work than did. We're not afraid to fail. We try something and it doesn't work, we try something else... finally about number 99 we find something that works. We celebrate it, we use it, we go out and teach a seminar on it and pretend like we planned it in advance. The issue is being willing to risk. You can be a risk taker – like the old phrase, "Behold the turtle. He only makes progress when he sticks his neck out." It's true for you too. If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space.

You can be a caretaker. A caretaker just maintains the status quo. Status quo is Latin for "the mess we're in". You just rumble along. People say, "We have a sound church." Sound asleep! George Patton used to complain of field Marshall Montgomery "He seems to be more interested in not losing battle than he is in winning battles." He's always got this protective edge.

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You can be an undertaker. You oversee the slow death and burial of your congregation.

Satan's favorite tools against pastors and church leaders is the fear of failure. That's the reason why we don't set goals. It's the reason why we don't attempt things – that we'll set a goal and then not reach it, we'll fail. The Bible says in Proverbs 29:25 *"The fear of man is a snare."* It's a trap. That means that the moment I start worrying about what other people are thinking, I'm dead in the water. When I start worrying about how I look to you, or how I look to other people, then I get my eyes off of God and onto you and I'm bound to fail. The fear of man, the fear of the opinion of man, the fear of what other people think is a deadly trap for ministers. It's a snare. And it will mess your life up.

You need to learn to live your life for an audience of one. As best as I know how I am trying to do this. As I stand before the Lord today, I try to live my life in such a way that one day I will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and hear Him say, *"Well done thou good and faithful servant. You were faithful in a few things now you'll be faithful in many. Come you blessed of My Father and inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* That will be worth it all. It really doesn't matter what anybody else thinks about your ministry. All that matters is what God thinks. And if God is all you're concerned with, you don't have to worry about failure. Just work on focusing on pleasing Him.

How do you get rid of the fear of failure? You're never going to grow a great church without doing this. There are two ways to eliminate the fear of failure.

One, redefine failure. Failure is not failing to reach your goal. Failure is failing to set a goal. Failing is not falling down. Everybody falls down. Failure is refusing to get back up. Failure is not trying and not making it. Failure is refusing to try.

I'll never forget learning this the very first year of the church. When Saddleback was eight months old, I said let's have an eight month old anniversary service. We celebrated everything that first year – the first diaper change, the first ice cream social... I said let's celebrate our eight month anniversary and let's set a high attendance goal. I had a group of people meeting with me and I had a blackboard behind me and I said, "Everyone bow your head. I'm going to say a number and when you think that is the number we should set for our eighth month anniversary of our church you raise your hand. At that time I think we were running about 125-150 people in attendance. I started: "150?" Nobody raised their hand. "200?" Nobody raised their hand. "250?" Nobody raised their hand. "300?" Maybe one hand. I'm starting to get a little nervous now. "350?" Nobody. "400?" Nobody. "450?" I can feel the beads of perspiration forming on my face. "500?" Almost every hand in the room went up.

I wrote on the board 500. I said, "Everybody raise their heads. You have just said that you believe it's God's will that we have 500 people in attendance. That's our goal for our eighth month anniversary as a church."

I went home from that meeting scared to death! Boy, was I telling God off!! I was preaching to Him. "God, let me tell You what You've got me into! There's no way this is going to happen. Let me tell you what's going to happen, God. Our people are going to work real hard, pray real hard, sacrifice, support and invite their friends and we're going to have people show up. But no

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way are we going to have 500 on the eighth month anniversary of a brand new church. We're all going to be disappointed. And everybody will feel like God let us down. And then we're going to feel let down. The morale will be worse than it was before and we'll feel like a bunch of failures. What do You think about that, God!!" I can just hear God saying back to me, "Rick, you need to go read your own sermons! What is it about how to get rid of the fear of failure? Redefine failure. Failure is not failing to reach a goal. Failure is failing to set a goal. It's not, not making your dream. It's not even trying to have a dream."

All of a sudden I realized that my people were already a success. It didn't matter whether we reached 500 or not. It's the very fact that they were willing to go for it, to try for it. At least they were willing to try for something that to our knowledge, we didn't know if anybody else had tried that in the first year of a church. At least they were going to make the effort. So I went back to them and explained that to them. I said, "You guys are already a success. You're willing to try to have 500 people when 95% of the churches in America don't even have 300. So God bless you. I'm proud of you. I'm proud of your faith."

The fact is on that day, we didn't have 500. We had 380. But that's not bad for eight months old as a church. And do you think we would have had 380 if we'd set a goal of 200? Not a chance. You aim for the moon and you hit the fence post. My dad used to tell me that a hundred times. Aim for the moon and hit the fence post. And watch God raise the sights of the people.

Babe Ruth once said, "Never let the fear of striking out keep you from taking a swing." We all know that Babe Ruth hit the most home runs in one season. But he also had the most strikeouts in a single season, too. He wasn't afraid of striking out because he was going for the long ball every time he came up to bat. Redefine failure.

Another way you eliminate the fear of failure is to refuse to compare yourself. Don't compare yourself to anybody else. Tom talked about this pretty eloquently earlier today. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:12 "*It is foolish to compare yourself to other people.*" There are two reasons why you should never compare yourself to any other ministry or minister. One, you're going to always find somebody whose doing a better job than you and you're going to get discouraged. Two, you're always going to find somebody you're doing a better job than and you get full of pride. Either way you're dead in the water. Two things you do not need in your ministry are pride and discouragement. But if you compare yourself to other churches or other ministries, you're going to get one or both. Don't do it. Don't ever compare yourself to anybody else.

Too often today we become comfortable with comparisons. We say, "We did better than so and so..." The truth is they didn't do any good either. "At least we didn't loose as many as they did." I stopped reading my denomination's annual probably seventeen-eighteen years ago. I haven't picked one up since. Why? Because I would read those annual reports. I remember reading them the first year or two and seeing the number of people that we had baptized and comparing it to the baptisms of churches three, four, five times our size and had been around twenty, thirty, forty years. I remember reading that and thinking, "We're doing pretty good!" And I felt a little bit of pride coming up inside of me, comparing myself to other churches. I would say, "We're doing ok for a brand new church."

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And all of a sudden God smote me. He said, “Rick, I never called you to compare yourself to anybody else. If you do you’ll be comfortable with comparisons. You won’t set your sights for the level that I have intended for your life. You’ll just say, ‘We did better than so and so.’ But maybe I wanted to do a lot better than that. Or something totally different.” On top of that we’re all shaped differently. We all have different ministries. And comparing an urban church and a rural church or a suburban church is like comparing tangerines and submarines. They’re not even in the same genre. We don’t do it.

I do believe in church growth but one thing I do not like about the church growth movement is this incessant comparing of churches. It always leads to depression or discouragement or pride.

When you get to heaven, God is not going to say to you, “Why weren’t you more like Bill Hybels? ... Why weren’t you more like Billy Graham? Why weren’t you more like Jerry Falwell? Why weren’t you more like...” name your hero. When you get to heaven God is going to say, “Why weren’t you more like you? I made you to be you. You’re unique. You’re not one in a million. You’re one in six billion. There’s nobody like you. I made you to be you. If you don’t be you, who’s going to be you?” I’ve discovered God has not called me to be the best pastor in the world. He has called me to be the best pastor that He made me to be. The best pastor that I could possibly be, given the gifts, talents, abilities, opportunities that are unique to my situation. That takes away all the competition. And when you take away the competition, the fear of failure is reduced. Again: There is no correlation between the size and the strength of a church. No correlation at all. You can be big and strong or big and weak or small and strong or small and weak. It’s not big is better. It’s not small is better. But healthy, purpose driven is better.

I know some of you are thinking that because you minister in relative obscurity that your ministry must not be that important. You serve in a small church, maybe in a small town. The truth is, you’re never going to get your picture on the cover of *Rolling Stone* or *Christianity Today* for that matter. You’re never going to get interviewed in *Leadership* magazine. You’re not going to be invited to preach to your denomination’s pastors’ conference. In fact, many people even in your own denomination aren’t even going to know who you are. You think because your ministry is relatively obscure that it is unimportant.

You are dead wrong! Dead, dead wrong! Your ministry matters to God. God made you, made you, you. He knows everything about you. He has every hair on your head numbered. (For some of you that isn’t too difficult.) He knows you and He put you in that spot. You better stay there until God tells you to move.

Prominence is not the same thing as significance. That is something that our culture does not understand. Prominence and significance are two different issues. Today, in a world of celebrities and superstars we just assume that the most famous people are the most important people. Or the best known people are the smartest people. Or the most visible churches are the most important churches. Wrong! Prominence and significance are two different issues.

My nose is a very prominent part of my body. It just kind of hangs out there. You can’t look at my face without seeing my nose. I have a very prominent nose. It may be prominent but it isn’t significant. There are other parts of my body inside that I couldn’t live without. I could live without a nose. But I couldn’t live without my heart or kidneys or liver or whatever.

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Significance and prominence are two different issues. Don't worry about whether anybody knows what you're doing. God knows what you're doing. Live for that audience of one.

The Bible says in Galatians 6:4 *"Each man should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to someone else."*

There is a place of legitimate pride in your ministry. There is a place for legitimate satisfaction. I'm proud of what God is doing at Saddleback church. I am humbled but I am also proud of the fact that God is using people in this church in ways that I have never seen before. I am satisfied and deeply humbled but also deeply fulfilled in watching what He does through people in this church and what He's done through my teaching and through the ministry of my wife and I since we started the church. There is legitimate satisfaction. I say, "God, thank You for letting me be a part of Saddleback. That You for letting me be in on a church like this." That's fine. But the moment I start comparing myself to somebody else, I've sinned. *"Let each man test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to others."*

I believe that goals should be based on not what other people are doing – we've got to set that goal because they did – and goals should not even be based on what we think we can do ourselves. But goals should be based on what we believe God can do, not what we think we can do. What we think God can do. You let the size of your God determine the size of your goal. God is looking for people who will let Him be God.

One of my favorite sketches in the old Saturday Night Live show was Chevy Chase would come in and say, "Hi, I'm Chevy Chase and you're not." I can often imagine God saying to me, "Hi, I'm God and you're not." Let God set the size of your goal. Let the size of your God determine the size of your goal.

If I told you some of the dreams, some of the goals that we have for Saddleback church in the future, if I just laid them out to you right now, some of you would be thinking, "Who do you think you are?" I would say to you, "That's the wrong question. The question is not who do I think I am? The question is who do I think God is? The size of your God determines the size of your goal.

I'll never forget when the word got out in this community that Saddleback church was going after initially 79 acres of land and we later added 41 more, when it got out in this community that a church was trying to buy 79 acres of land in Orange County, people thought it was ludicrous. Just a couple of months before 100 acres in a business park in Mission Viejo sold for 40 million dollars. It was \$400,000 an acre. "Those people over there at that church, who do they think they are, going after 79 acres of prime land?" And again, it's not who we are that matters. In our own power we can't accomplish anything. But *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

You have not believed God until you've attempted something that *can't* be done in the power of the flesh. Fred Smith's definition of hell, "Hell would be if God were to show me all I could have accomplished if I believed Him a little bit more. That would be hell." I want to live my life in such a way that I am absolutely bound to fail unless God bails me out. God uses the person who is willing to risk failure. I've told my people that when I die, I want four words written on my tombstone, "At least he tried."

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We have already accomplished a lot. But it's nothing compared to what I think God wants to do. And we may not reach all the goals that I think God has given to me but I'm going to die trying. Because I don't know anything more important than that. Never fear failure if what you are attempting for God would ultimately bring glory to Him. Never fear failure if you're doing it in love. Because if your heart is filled with love the Bible says, "*Love never fails.*" So even if you don't reach your goal, if you're doing it out of love you're not a failure. Because love never fails. You haven't believed God until you've attempted the impossible.

God uses the person who not only has a dream, who is not only willing to risk failure but ...

3. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO EXPECTS THE CHURCH TO GROW.

You must be both realistic and you have to be optimistic. You must have a high expectation. That is an evidence of faith. The difference between winners and losers is attitude. The person, who says "I can," and the person who says "I can't," are both right. If you think you can't, believe me, you can't. Enthusiasm is essential for growth. Without enthusiasm your church will never grow. Where do you get enthusiasm? Enthusiasm comes from two Greek words "*en*" and "*theos*" which is the word for "God". "Theology is the study of God. "*En theos*" means to be in God. When you get in God you will be naturally enthusiastic. That is not some kind of pick yourself up by your own psychological bootstraps and hip-hip-hip. It's a wonderful day. I feel healthy. I feel happy. I feel great. Positive mental attitude Psych myself into thinking what I know isn't true. It's getting in God and getting in harmony with God and having a vibrant, real, alive relationship with the creator of the universe on a moment by moment basis and talking to Him.

Honestly, as I was driving to church this morning for this conference I saw a woman on a bike and I said, "God, please save that woman." I went further and saw a couple of joggers and said, "God, help Jesus Christ come into their hearts." I was praying for each person as I was driving here this morning. It's not anything special, it's just when you're hooked in with God you start thinking that way. You look at people. When you see a beautiful woman, you don't want to lust after her, you want to pray for her! That doesn't happen in my normal flesh. That only happens when I'm in harmony with God, when I'm in unity with God and when I'm *en theos* then I get enthusiastic about God's plan for the world.

One of my favorite verses is Matthew 9:29, "*According to your faith, it will be done unto you.*" I love that verse. God says, "You get to choose. *According to your faith it will be done unto you.* You get to choose how much I bless your life. *According to your faith it will be done unto you.* You get to choose how much I bless your family. *According to your faith it will be done unto you.* You get to choose how much I use you. You get to choose how much I grow your church. *According to your faith it will be done unto you.*" What a wonderful privilege. God has said, "It's in your hands."

I'll never forget as I told you in the last session about getting up in front of the church and saying, "It's time to start finding land. If you have background in real estate or finances, show up and we'll form a little task force." The next night when thirteen men showed up, they were of all different backgrounds – real estate brokers, banker, guys really talented and willing to do this

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work. I said, “We’re going to find at least fifty acres of land. Now go for it! Meeting is dismissed!” That’s all we did. I let them loose.

They came back a week later and they’d found one of the few remaining pieces of property in the Saddleback Valley owned by a private developer. Most of the land in this Valley is owned by one of four or five major landowners. We went to the Mission Viejo company and they said they’d sell us a quarter of an acre for \$300,000. I said “A quarter of an acre? We couldn’t put our big toe on that!” They came back and found a piece of property back against the mountain 72 acres for 7.2 million dollars. Our church was running about 500 people at the time and 7.2 million dollars for raw land for a church of 500 people. The men said to me, “Pastor, you want to go for it?” I said, “Why not?” You never say no just because something’s impossible.

We went out and put \$10,000 down on a 7.2 million-dollar piece of property. During the next year and a half we got the zoning changed, the water rights changed, the use permit changed. Everything like that. But we couldn’t find anybody who would loan us the money. Anybody! After a year and a half of time, the owners of that property came and said, “We want you to start putting up \$20,000 a month, non refundable, to keep the escrow open.” I said, “I’m sorry, I can’t do that. I can’t gamble our people’s funds we’ll just have to drop out of escrow. Once we get the funds we’ll come back and we will buy the property.” We dropped out of escrow and the very next day that piece of property was bought by a shopping center. We lost a year and a half of time and \$100,000 invested.

I was depressed. I said, “God, what’s going on here. We’re working, we’re praying. It’s just not working.” It took us a year and a half of time til we found a second piece of property. Three hundred acres out in the canyon. Two hundred of it totally worthless, straight up a mountain. We went to the guy and said we’d buy the front 100 acres for six million dollars. He said if we would buy the front 100 acres for six million he’d give us the back 200 as a tax write off for free.

Fine. That was great. We went out, did a big building campaign called Possess Our Land. We were going to call it Possess The Land but the initials were PTL and that was the year Jim Baker fell. So we decided Possess Our Land was a little better. Our people gave on one day a half million in cash and three million in commitments. We were real excited. I went back to the owner and said, “We’re ready to close the deal. We’ve got a half million in cash and three million in commitments over the next couple of years. Let’s close the deal.” He said, “I’ve changed my mind. I’m raising the price to eight million.”

And my heart sank! We had just had thirty days of prayer and fasting and a sixty-day building campaign, we had people actually sell their homes and buy smaller homes and gave the equity. People gave retirement programs. People canceled vacations. People took second jobs. Everybody on staff was clearing out our bank accounts and giving everything we had. We’d just sacrificed! I didn’t know what to do. After we had that big offering on Sunday and on Monday this guy tells me, “I’m raising the price two million dollars,” my heart sank. Now it had gone from faith to presumption. And there was no way we were going to be able to afford eight million dollars.

I looked at God and said, “God, You’ve got a problem. It’s not my problem because it’s not my church. You’ve got a problem. What are You going to tell the people next Sunday when they

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show up. They've sacrificed and suffered and prayed and given and now we've lost this piece of property. What are You going to do?"

In God's timing – two days after that deal fell through, a third and final piece of property came up on the market. It was 113 acres here in the canyon and it was on the market for 3.5 million dollars. Half the price of what we were going to pay before. It was the cheapest piece of property I'd seen ever in Orange County. It was such a good deal, seven other developers made a bid on it and four of them offered cash. So I met with the owner of the property, a retired military general. He owned an airline company. I said, "We don't have the cash and I know you could be bought out by these other guys. We have a half million in cash. What would it take for you to sell it to the church?" He said, "I'll tell you what. If you can close the deal before the end of the year, I'll sell it to the church."

It's October. So I go back to the people and say, "Folks, what do you want to do? We've either got to raise more money in the next sixty days or we loose this deal. But I don't know how you get blood out of a turnip. We've already given everything we've got." Our people, because they were people of faith said, "Pastor, lets go for it." They went back to their pocketbooks, took on more jobs. They found other sources of income, emptied out piggy banks and in the last sixty days of that year 1987, they gave over and above their normal offerings 1.2 million dollars in sixty days.

We got up to the very last business day of 1987. We still didn't have enough money to close the deal. I had remembered a man who I had met who owned a bank. When we'd tried to find loans we'd gone to about 80 different institutions. I had met this guy, gone up to the top story of his building, sat in his penthouse, presented our case. He was a Christian, a great guy, a wonderful man. In fact, we started talking about growing tomatoes – we both had gardens. Then he said, "I'm sorry, but we don't loan money to churches. It's the policy of our bank. But I don't want you to be discouraged but to be encouraged." But I didn't need encouragement, I needed money!

That had been a couple years before. Two months later that man sent in the mail a little note (He'd never visited our church). It said, "I believe in the vision of Saddleback church," and there was 1000 shares of his stock in his bank valued at \$30,000. I sent him a thank you note! A year later that man sent 2,000 shares of stock and a note that said, "I believe in the vision of Saddleback church." This time the value was \$60,000. On the basis of one fifteen minute conversation. He didn't even live in this area. He lived up in LA.

Here's a man who had given ninety grand to a church he'd never even visited. When we were doing this Possess Our Land campaign I said, "God, I need somebody who can give an offering so big it will challenge everybody else and we'll know God is in this." But I don't have anybody like that in our church. No rich people, but a bunch of young people. I said, "I do know one guy who could give it," and I was thinking of this guy. I said, "But he's not even a member. He's never even been to this church." If he were a member I would have had no problem going to him and saying would you consider giving the lead off gift, a challenge gift. I said, "God, I'm not a fundraiser, a flashy high pressure salesman. I'll ask him but if You want him to give that money work it out in such a way that people go, 'Only God did it.'"

I remember it was in August of that year and we were in Trabuco Hills High School and it was about one hundred temperature and there was no air conditioning in that gym and we were all

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sweating like pigs, smelly. It was terrible. I got up to kick off our building campaign “Investing for Eternity” was the message. That you can’t outgive God.

As I got up to speak, to deliver that message, who should decide to come to church for the very first time? That man and his wife and his kids and his grandkids. They had driven about an hour to come to church on the Sunday we’re kicking off the building campaign. I hadn’t invited him. Nobody had invited him. When I stood up to speak and looked over and saw him walk in, I burst into tears. Only God can do that kind of thing.

After the message was over I walked out on the patio and he said, “Rick, I’d be willing to help in the building campaign.” I said, “No kidding? What a great idea! Wish I had thought of that!”

When we came up to that closing date and we still didn’t have money that December 21, that man on the final day not only changed the policy of the bank and loaned the church the money we needed but he personally gave a quarter of a million dollars. And we closed the deal. That was the last business day of 1987.

The first business day of 1988, the board of trustees of his bank called him in. They said, “We had record profits last year. We had a banner year. We’re going to give you a one time bonus as president.” They did not know that ten days earlier he had given a quarter of a million dollars to a church he’d been to one time. They gave him, ten days later, a bonus of \$750,000. He called me on the phone and said, “Rick! You can’t out give God!”

I’ve seen that happen hundreds of times in people’s lives. I seen it happen dozens of times in my own life. You cannot out give God.

We bought the land. We’re all excited. We got the Promised Land. We started reading the book of Joshua and found out there were giants in the land! In this case it wasn’t a giant, it was a little gnat catcher bird and a bunch of environmentalists. For the next three and a half years we did battle with the county of Orange who was charging us taxes on the property but would not let us build on it. They said, “Of that 113 acres that you bought, you must give 104 acres back to the county to be open space as a park and we will let you build on nine acres. You must move 50 (or more) big oak trees from the back of the property to the front of the property to hide the church. You must build a 20-foot high burn (mountain) so that nobody could see the church behind it. You can’t build a 7000 seat auditorium. You can build a 1000 seat auditorium and have seven services. You must put in a charcoal filtration water system so when the water comes off your parking lot and goes into the gutter, it’s pure. They wanted about six to seven or more in environmental mitigations before we could even start building.

We went to war. During the next three and a half years we petitioned and we protested and wrote letters to the county and sent hundreds of our people to the courthouse. I took each of the county supervisors out to lunch. It was in the papers and everything. The Orange County *Register* and the *LA Times* came out with editorials supporting us. One of them “A church under siege.” It said, “The audacity of what the government is trying to do to this church. If that size church can’t get a building, what do you think anybody else is going to get?” I remember walking into the county offices in a public meeting and saying, “I realize that in the people’s republic of Orange County that there are a few laws but this is ridiculous.” Finally after three and a half years of battle – we just kept going on and on and the church was growing to two

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services, three services, four services. Finally I took our church directory in there which at that time had 19,000 names in it. It was about two inches thick. I set it on the desk of the county supervisor for this district and I said, “There are 19,000 names on this church role. They are all voters and they’re all in your district. You have a problem. You either let us build on that land or you help us get us another piece of land so we can do what we need to do.”

As it worked out, we found the developer who owned this piece of property which was far better located, far better suited, and we were able to swap even-even, that piece of property for this piece of property. In that three and a half year period, that piece of property had gone from 3.5 million dollars in value up to 6 million dollars and we traded it for this one which was worth nine million dollars which allowed us to walk into this one with six million dollars equity. That’s so like God!

That happened because we were expecting God to work. Never in all the years did I ever doubt that we would eventually get land. We went fifteen years before we built this building. Many people got discouraged but I did not get discouraged. Why? Because I knew if God kept bringing more and more people to this place, He somehow had a plan for where He was going to put them. God didn’t have fifty acres in mind. He had 120 acres in mind. God is able to do much more than you think or ask or imagine. But we weren’t ready for it. And God was more interested in building disciples than building buildings.

Satan’s favorite words are “You can’t do it!” I want my church to be an embarrassment to the devil. Never let an impossible situation intimidate you. Let it motivate you. Let it motivate you to pray more, to think more, to work more, to believe more, to fast more, to be more dedicated. Don’t let impossible situations intimidate you. Let them drive you to your knees. Today’s impossible situation is tomorrow’s miracle. Hudson Taylor says there are three phases to God’s work – impossible, possible, done. Faith works in the realm of the impossible. If every you use the word impossible again, listen for snickers from heaven. Cause God’s going to laughing.

If you were to go to my office and look behind my chair and pull out my Webster’s dictionary and look up the word “impossible” you would find something. It’s not there. Because I cut it out! The Bible says “*All things are possible with God.*” If “impossible” is not in God’s dictionary, it’s not in mine.

You not only expect the church to grow but you expect people to help you. Big thinking attracts big thinkers. You expect people to help you. I’ve kept this little card in my desk since the very first day of this church. It says this, “Great people are ready to help me at the right time in the right way, people I don’t even know yet. I promise I will never give up because I don’t have the help. But I will trust God to provide. The Bible says in Psalm 37:5 “*Commit your way to the Lord, trust Him to help you do it and He will.*” On the back it says this, “God has the resources to help you that you have not even considered. There are multiplied thousands of persons with all sorts of talents and skills and concerns and contacts that God can bring into your life in order to fulfill His plans. So open your eyes and see the faces of people around you. Open your ears to hear what they’re saying. Today, tomorrow, next week, you’ll meet someone – someone who’s just the right person and that right person that you need will come along at just the right time to fill just the right place and you will marvel knowing that God arranged it so wonderfully.”

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I could tell you stories til midnight how God's proven that one in my life. When Kay and I packed up everything in a U Haul truck and moved from Texas, we got here at four in the afternoon – my wife and I and our four month old baby, no money and no members, right in the middle of rush hour traffic in LA. I looked around and saw that and said, “God, You’ve got the wrong guy!” That was my first thought. I was raised in a town of less than 500 people. I'm a country boy. When I saw all these people on the freeway, bumper to bumper, I thought, “What in the world am I doing here?” At four in the afternoon we pulled off the freeway with no money, no members and I didn't know anybody and I found a real estate office. I walked in and met a guy named Don Dale. I said, “Hi, my name is Rick Warren. I'm here to start a new church. I need a place to live. I don't have any money.” He did what you just did! He laughed. He said, “Let's see what we can do” and of course where God guides, God provides and within two hours he had found us a condo. We took it. We signed the papers on it. He got us the first month rent-free because we didn't have any money. That man became the first member of Saddleback church. As we were driving, I said, “Don, do you go to church anywhere?” He said no. I said, “Good! You're my first member.” A week later we started Saddleback with my wife and I our little girl Amy, Don and his wife and his little daughter Heidi. That's how this thing got started.

God uses people who expect the church to grow and expect people to help. I had been here a couple of weeks. I didn't have any money. One day I get a call from a guy, “My name is Bill Grady. You don't know me but I'm a pastor of a little church up in Fullerton. What's your source of income? [I didn't have any.] I feel led to pay your rent for the next two months.” I didn't know him. God provided.

We were getting ready to do advertisements for the first service. I didn't know what to do. A guy shows up at the trial run service. He was an artist for Disney. He became the guy who did our first advertisements.

I remember we were buying nursery equipment for the very first service. We went to garage sales, collecting nursery equipment – toddler things, swings, bassinets, stuff. We found the stuff we needed. It was \$32.50. The only money we had was about \$50 in our checking account. That was money we were supposed to use for food. Kay wrote out the check, \$32.50, knowing that was what we were going to eat on. We walked back home. I opened up the mail box and took out a letter from a woman I had met one time, a little old lady, retired, from a church in Texas. I had preached at this church two times. She had just heard me twice. She said, “I heard that you were going to California to start a church. I thought you might need some money. The check was for \$32.50.

I could tell you story after story. If you will just trust God, if you will be willing to lay it all on the line – your reputation, your image, your money, your energy, your time – God will bail you out and you will marvel that He has brought the right people at the right time to help you out.

4. GOD USES THE PERSON WHO NEVER GIVES UP.

God uses the person who is persistent, who is diligent, who doesn't know how to quit. The Bible says in Luke 9:62 “*No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven.*” The secret of success is just keep on keeping on. Outlast your critics. Stay

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put. Be that oak tree – just a little nut that refused to give its ground and you grow into an oak tree. Great people are simply ordinary people who don't know how to quit. They don't know how to give up.

Galatians 6:9 *“Let us not grow weary in doing well. For we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* In a previous session, I told you that a pastor leaves a church because of eight critics. What does it take to discourage you? One little word of criticism and you're ready to throw in the towel? You want to give up? Call it quits?

I'll never forget when I first learned how to handle discouragement. I was a teenager, preaching a revival crusade in a little tiny church in northern California. I had been there Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I preached every night of the week and Sunday morning. Nobody had come to Christ and nobody had recommitted their life to Christ. It was a dead, dead church and I was so discouraged. It was my first real taste of discouragement in ministry. I'd poured my heart out. I remember going into the pastor's study, getting down on my knees praying, “God, I'm so discouraged and I don't know what to do. I don't know if I should accept this or reject it. I don't know if I should kind of go with the flow and be discouraged or if I should fight this, resist it. Please tell me what to do with this discouragement.” I finished that prayer and I began to look around the pastor's study. I'm an avid book reader. I read a lot of books. I was looking through his library. The pastor came in and I began talking to him. I happened to pull out a record (remember records?). It was a sermon by Jerry Falwell, “How to Double Your Sunday School Attendance in One Year.” I thought, I might be a pastor someday. I didn't have any plans at that time to be one. I said, “Would you mind if I listened to this?” He said, “Sure, I'll put it on for you.” He put the record on. But he put it on the opposite side by accident. On the backside there was a message by Jerry Falwell, on discouragement. Falwell said something that I've never forgotten “You do not determine a man's greatness by his talent, wealth or his education. You determine a man's greatness by what it takes to discourage him.”

What does it take to discourage you? Some deacon looks at you cross-eyed and you want to give up? Things don't turn out the way you thought? You have 50 people less than you thought you were going to have in the service?

At the height of World War II, right in the middle of it, Winston Churchill went to speak at a Men's School and they notified the students, “Be prepared the Prime Minister is coming to deliver a major wartime address.” The men were sitting there in their seats with their pencils and paper. Churchill walked into the room, looked squarely at the audience and said, “Gentlemen, never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never, never... give up. “ and he turned around and walked out of the room.

I have no doubt that God brought some of you here this week, in the middle of the summer time to southern California so that God could say to you, “Don't you do it. Don't you give up. Don't. Never give up. I'm not through with you. I'm not through with you where you are. Don't you give up.”

You want to know how many times I've wanted to resign from Saddleback church? Just every Monday morning. When you do five services, you don't believe in God until 11:00 a.m. on

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Monday. Never doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light. You are never a failure until you quit. It is always too soon to quit.

One of my favorite verses, Proverbs 24:16 *“Though a righteous man falls seven times he rises again.”* Even good guys stumble. Even righteous people make mistakes. You may be God’s man, God’s woman, you may have God’s anointing on your heart, but you’re still a human being. And righteous people do stumble. But the righteous person rises again. Failure is never final unless you let it be. You get back up and you go again. You keep on and you keep on and you keep on.

The fact is God uses problems to keep us dependent on Him. He gives us problems in ministry intentionally.

Question: How do you have big dreams without having a big ego? If you’ve ever thought about that, I honor you because that’s a valid question. There is no sin that God judges faster than pride. Pride is what caused Nebuchadnezzar to go crazy. Pride is what caused Herod to be eaten alive with worms. Pride is what caused Satan to get kicked out of heaven. God hates pride. In “sin”, the middle letter is “I”. God resists the proud, the Bible says.

So how do you have big dreams without getting a big head?

I’ve discovered when success goes to your head it usually pays a short visit. It doesn’t stay if you let it go there. How do you have humility and big dreams at the same time?

I believe this is so important because the two most important factors for the power of God in your life are integrity and humility. If you don’t have those, you will not have the power of God in your life. Some ways God will keep you humble:

1. When you get a big dream and your church starts growing, you will be criticized unjustly, unfairly, ruthlessly. Your motives will be questioned. You will be called an Empire Builder. The moment you hang out your shingle, somebody’s going to start throwing rocks at it. It is not by accident that the most blessed ministries in the world are also the most criticized ministries. It goes with the course. All the pioneers take the arrows in the back. If you’re leading the way, you’re going to get shot at from behind. The fact is, the world and much of the church does not understand how much lost people really do matter to God. They have no conception of it. So they will attribute your growth to some other motive.

2. You will have problems that are solved only through prayer. They will force you to your knees.

3. God will keep you humble by allowing you to make stupid mistakes. You may be anointed but you’re still human. Humility is not denying your strengths. It is being honest about your weaknesses. We’re all a bundle of strengths and weaknesses. I have some enormous strengths. I also have some enormous weaknesses. So do you. You have some great strengths but you also have some great weaknesses. We’re all a bundle of strengths and weaknesses. Humility is not going around saying, “Oh, I’m not good at anything. I’m no good. I don’t have any strengths.” That’s pride actually. It’s a form of pride – false humility. Humility is not being honest about your strengths, it’s being honest about your weaknesses and admitting them. You will make stupid mistakes.

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4. The dream will be so big you're bound to fail unless God does a miracle. Humility is in essence a total dependence upon God. I want to challenge you to make a declaration of dependence upon God.

5. Other people will take credit for your work. They will. God can do great things through the person who doesn't care who gets the credit. I've had people say, "Don't rip off books about what Saddleback's doing bother you?" I feel a lot of times like Paul did, "Whatever the motive, as long as the message gets out. God be praised." I honestly don't want to be a celebrity. That's why I've said we're never going on TV or the radio. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:7 *"Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who makes things grow."* God gets the glory. God gets the credit. Remember the lesson of the whale: when you get to the top and you're ready to blow, that's when you get harpooned. Be very careful. The man who gets too big for his britches will eventually be exposed in the end.

Here's the point: It's easy for God to humble you. It's no big deal for Him to humble you. God has a million different ways to humble us. Are you married? Do you have children? Humility is not an issue that God has a hard time with. He could pull the rug out from you a thousand different ways.

What God does have a hard time with is getting you to believe bigger than you've ever believed for. And dream bigger and expect more and pray more and serve more and share more.

Let me talk with you a bit about this issue of confidence. This is a deeper issue. The fact is we come to conferences like this, we get all excited, we get real motivated, our vision expanded about thinking our church will grow and develop and reach out in the community and have impact. We get this vision about what we believe God can do in our church. We go back home with such a big vision. But the truth is, if our churches grow at the rate we dream about them to grow at, we'd be embarrassed to death. I know this because it happened to me.

At the end of the first year of the church, we had been working 18 hours a day all year and I was loving every minute of it. We had the office in our home. The church had grown from 0 to about 150-175 people. It was a lot of fun. But I felt like the director of an orphanage – all these baby Christians, caring for everybody's needs. I was wearing down because I hadn't taken a vacation and we were just tired. On the last Sunday of the year, I stood up to speak and collapsed. I fainted. It scared me to death. I took the entire next month off, the first month of the second year of this church. I was so depressed because I was actually afraid to get back up in the pulpit. I was afraid it would happen again, that I'd faint.

I took my wife and my kids out to Phoenix where her parents live and I had my desert experience with the Lord. While I was out there, during that period of emotional burnout, there were haunting fears going through my mind.

One was, "God, I don't deserve this. You're blessing my life too much. You've taken this church from 0 to 150-175 in one year. This is the only church I've ever been the senior pastor of. I'm a freshly graduated seminary student. I don't deserve this kind of blessing. I'm not the man of God I ought to be." I have a difficult time being consistent with a quiet time, much less

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being a pastor. I am not by nature a disciplined person at all. I was thinking, “I’m just not the man of God I ought to be! I don’t deserve this and it’s haunting me.”

The other thing was, “God, I can’t handle it. The church is growing too fast.” I was smart enough to figure out that at this rate of growth from 0 –150-175 the first year, within a few years we’d be running several thousand (little did I know). I was down! Depressed, discouraged!

Out there in that desert experience, God said three things to me that changed my life. He said, one, “You’re right, Rick, you don’t deserve it. But you never will. It’s all by grace.” I don’t deserve to be a Christian. I don’t deserve to be saved, much less in the ministry. Everything that God does in me and for me and through me and to me and in you and through you and for you and to you, He does by grace through faith. We’re all trophies of grace. You never will deserve God’s blessing in your life.

The next thing God said is, “Rick, who’s church is it?” I said, “It’s Your church, Jesus.” and Jesus said, “I will build My church. You focus on building people and I’ll build the church.” I said, “Jesus, You’ve got a deal.” I remember imagining myself getting up out of my chair in my study and saying, “Ok, Jesus Christ, You are now the pastor of Saddleback church. You call the shots. It’s Your church. Ultimately it’s not up to my ingenuity, my creativity, my talent, my giftedness, my whatever to make this thing happen because it’s Your church.” And a mountain of weight just flew off my back.

When I got those two things settled – that God uses me by grace through faith and ultimately it was His church and His responsibility to make it grow – out of that came the third conviction: I am God’s man with God’s message for Saddleback church at this point in time. Nothing can shake that from my life. Nothing! No critic, no health problem, no crisis, no conflict, no lack of a building for fifteen years. Nothing can shake that. I am God’s man for this church at this moment in time.

What some of you need to do is go off and sit under a tree and get an assurance of God’s call on your life again. Don’t move until you are sure of it. Remember that every God does for and through you He does by grace. Jesus said, “*You haven’t chosen Me, I have chosen you.*” The truth is, many of you feel guilt about being in ministry. You think, I had these parents, this background, this major problem in my life, those secret sins, those things that Satan tries to keep reminding me of. When he reminds you of your past, you remind him of his future! You are a trophy of grace. And God gave you His calling and He will use even your hurts, even your mistakes, even your mixed motives, even the stupid things in your life to bring good out of them if you’ll lay them all on the table and say, “Here, God. Here it is.”

I am convinced that authentic leadership always grows out of a crisis. And authentic leadership is always based in faith in God’s grace. What is grace? Grace is the fact that God knows every stupid mistake I’m going to make in ministry and He still chose me. Grace is the fact that God knows every dumb stunt that you’re going to pull in the ministry and He still chose you. That is grace. The success of Saddleback church is a testimony to the grace of God. The testimony of man’s faith in God’s grace. The fact is God uses ordinary people. If God used only supernatural or perfect people, what would get done in this world? Nothing! God uses imperfect people. He uses ordinary people to get extraordinary results. God works in your life according to your faith.

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I cannot overestimate the importance of faith in your life. The Bible says *“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”* *“Without faith it’s impossible to please God”* How many times have you sinned today? How much did you please God today? Whatever is not of faith is sin. What is God doing in your life? I can tell you what He’s doing. Without even knowing you, I can tell you exactly what God’s doing in your life. He’s doing exactly what you expect Him to do. No more, no less. If you study scripture you find that whenever God moved out of Heaven and moved on earth and did a miracle was because somebody believed.

How much are you believing God? Are you piddling around in the shallows of life, slapping the top of the water and thinking you’re making a big wave? Or are you willing to risk failure, be persistent, give it all you’ve got, and totally dedicate yourself to the ministry of Jesus Christ?

We limit God so much by our unbelief. There are many factors in your life and in my life that we don’t have control over. I call these the sovereignty factors of church growth. For instance, I didn’t choose who my parents would be. You didn’t either. I didn’t choose the natural gifts that God gave me and you didn’t either. I didn’t choose to be born in America. I didn’t choose when I was born, where I was born, who I was born to. I didn’t choose who the people are that God has brought to this church. There are lots of things that I don’t have control over that do effect the growth of this church. And it’s true with you too.

But there is one thing that I do have control over. That is my choice and it is how much I choose to believe God. That’s my choice. And that’s your choice too.

I believe that God is building a great world class church in Saddleback Valley Community Church. Why? Because the people here are extra special? No, they’re not. Because the staff and pastors are extra special? No, we’re not. But because God has found a group of people in this church who have decided to believe God just a little bit more than other churches have believed Him for and that’s our choice. Any other church in the world could choose to build a 4.5 million-dollar bridge. That took faith to do that. It took faith and sacrifice and giving. There were a group of people who said, that’s how much people matter to god. 4.5 million dollars worth of concrete. For what? It doesn’t even look pretty. It’s just something people run over. But it’s there because everybody needs Jesus and it’s a symbol of building a bridge to the world. God built a bridge to us through Christ and we’re building that bridge to the world.

I used to think that God is kind of arbitrary in who He chose to use. That He looked out on the world and said, “I’m going to use you but not *you*. All the rest of you sorry, tough luck, you’re left out.” But that’s not what the Bible says.

2 Chronicles 16:9 *“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth that God may show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward Him.”* God is looking for people to use. If you get usable, God will wear you out.