

SUMMER DEVOTIONS WEEK #12: August 17- August 23, 2015

I'm a bit blue this morning. Spent emotionally. Sharon and I dropped off Emily a few days ago at college. This is another mile marker in my life to push through. I'm going to miss my dear, dear sweet daughter. I already do.

Two weeks of summer left. I'm praying these short, simple devotions are having an impact in your life. At a minimum, I'm praying that they are leading you to know the value in meeting with The Lord daily. I'm praying for you to develop this spiritual discipline and that it will last your life-time.

This week, I'd like to share with you a few of the leadership lessons I have learned over the years. My prayer is that they will encourage you in the areas of your life where you lead. Leaders are always defined by the standards they set for themselves. Not standards set by other people, but self-imposed standards. Great leaders always expect more from themselves than they do from their followers and they willingly put forth more effort. That's a quality of leadership.

I love you guys. Endure. Keep moving forward. Persevere. Be immovable. Stand firm.

Pastor Mike

Monday, August 17, 2015• Summer Devotions Day #78

If you were to take the phrase "make every effort" and look it up in the New Testament, you would find that phrase is used six different times. "Make every effort." When you look at those six usages of that phrase in the New Testament, you'll find what I call the six vows for spiritual leadership.

I believe if you will take these six "make every effort" statements and make them personal vows in your life, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive. You will find that these qualities will increase your effectiveness as a leader.

LEADERSHIP VOW #1. AS A LEADER I VOW TO MAINTAIN MY INTEGRITY

The bottom line, the foundation, of all leadership is integrity. 2 Peter 3:14 says, "*Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him.*" What does it mean to be spotless and blameless? Does it mean to be perfect? Of course not, nobody is perfect. But it does mean to have integrity. How do you maintain integrity if you're not perfect? By being transparent. By being authentic. By being real and vulnerable. By not hiding your faults. Those who hide their faults, the Bible says, will fail; but those who confess them and forsake them get a second chance. You've heard me say before that humility is not denying your strength it's simply being honest about your weaknesses. A person of integrity is not claiming to have it all together in every area. On the contrary, the person of integrity says, "This is where I do have it together and this is where I don't."

Having integrity also means living what you say you believe. You walk the talk. You don't just teach it but you model it. And you believe it and behave it. Integrity means telling the truth. Did you know that there is only one letter difference between "truth" and "trust" because they really do go together? All leadership is built on trust. And trust comes from having the reputation for telling the truth. It comes from consistently telling the truth even when it's difficult. If you're going to be a leader, you've got to have people trust you. And if you're going to have people trust you, you must always tell the truth.

That also means that as a leader, having integrity means keeping your promises. You don't say one thing and then do another. This way you're able to maintain a clear conscience. When people know that you are a truth teller they then can trust you. Proverbs 28:13 (LB) says, "*A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful but if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance.*"

This is an issue that has direct bearing on fallen leadership and how quickly they should be restored. Many Christians today misunderstand the difference between forgiveness and trust. Forgiveness is instant but trust is built over a period of time. Trust comes from having a track record. While we must be quick to forgive we are not called to instantly trust people who do not have a track record for being trustworthy. When someone falls in leadership in your church, forgiveness is to be instant and fellowship is to be instant, but they must prove themselves over a period of time before they are placed back into a position of leadership. Leaders maintain integrity.

Tuesday, August 18, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #79

LEADERSHIP VOW #2. AS A LEADER I VOW TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO HURT ME.

Hebrews 12:15 says “*Make every effort to live in peace with all men. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up.*” Why? Because it “*...causes trouble and defiles many.*” The fact is you will be hurt in ministry. You will be hurt in life. It’s a given. You will be hurt intentionally and you will be hurt unintentionally. You will be hurt by those that recognize that they’re doing it to you and by those who don’t recognize it. You cannot be in ministry and you cannot be a leader without being hurt. If you call the shots you’re going to take the shots. Pioneers always get the arrows. Once you put out your shingle, somebody’s going to start throwing rocks at it. It is not by accident that the most blessed ministries in America are also the most criticized ministries.

One of the most deadly diseases for leaders, then, is bitterness. Because if you allow bitterness to grow up in your life it will choke your heart for God, it will choke the spirituality and your love for people until your heart just shrivels.

As a leader, if you don’t make this vow, when you are misunderstood or when you are maligned or when you are criticized unjustly you’re going to be tempted to retaliate and you probably will. But you cannot get away with that and still be a leader. Spiritual leadership requires forgiveness.

Jesus was a perfect leader and yet He was betrayed. Judas betrayed Him and hurt Him. And Jesus was hurt by the other disciples as well. If you were even a perfect leader, you would still be hurt by others. It’s not always your fault. But it is your fault if you carry bitterness in your heart. That keeps you from being what God wants you to be.

Probably the greatest example of this in the Old Testament is Moses. Moses had to put up with two million crying babies for forty years. Although he had saved them from four hundred years of bondage, although he provided for them the way God told him to provide for them all the time, the people criticized him. He was constantly maligned. They rebelled at him. They wanted to overthrow him several times. Yet Moses refused to have a bitter spirit. There are only two people in the Bible who are called “meek” – Jesus and Moses. He learned how to handle criticism.

Why do people hurt leaders? There are many different reasons. Sometimes they do it simply out of jealousy. Sometimes they do it to get attention for themselves. Sometimes they’re taking up an offense for someone else they think was hurt. One of the most common problems in churches today is people getting upset on behalf of others. But really one of the main reasons is we all just have a rebellious nature. We have a problem with authority. We don’t like to be told what to do.

Warren Bennis wrote a book [Why Leaders Can’t Lead](#). In our culture in America we build leaders up only to tear them down. This is a common occurrence among all our presidents and all our other well know leaders.

Also sometimes people will hurt leaders simply because they’re transferring anger from one authority to another. Or maybe they’re upset at home. Or maybe they’re upset at work. They come to church and find a safe place where they can vent it. As a leader, you must be able to absorb the hurts of other people without having to give an explanation every time people disagree with you.

This is very important because sometimes you will have to make unpopular decisions that you cannot always explain. Sometimes you just have to let people be upset with you rather than explaining to everyone, every one of your actions.

Why should I forgive others? It says make every effort to live in peace with all men and don't allow any bitter root to grow up. Why should I forgive those people who hurt me? It's healing and because God's forgiven us.

As a leader, first, you make every effort to maintain your integrity. Second, you make every effort to forgive those who hurt you and not allow a bitter root to grow up.

Wednesday, August 19, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #80

LEADERSHIP VOW #3. AS A LEADER I WILL RELAX AND TRUST GOD.

Hebrews 4:11 says, "Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us therefore make every effort to enter into God's rest." He's talking about what I call relaxed concern. If you're going to be in ministry, you've got to learn relaxed concern. That is, you must be concerned about the needs of all the people around you, but remember you're not God. So you cannot bear everybody's burden all the time. You must have relaxed concern.

What are some ways that I can relax and trust God more? In your ministry, how could you relax more and trust God more? Do you think praying more would be helpful? If we prayed more instead of worry we'd have a lot less to worry about. Just realize that God is in control. He's in control of your ministry and it's ultimately His responsibility to make the ministry grow that you're in. You're to be faithful. You're to do all you can but it's God's ministry. So you relax and let God be God and don't get in such a hurry to push it.

Other ways you develop a relaxed concern? Develop a quiet time; not talk so much about the problem; turn it over to God and not take it back; meditate on His promises; look at God's track record. In 2 Chronicles 20 when Jehosaphat was facing three enemy nations and they were about to be killed, Jehosaphat prays a famous prayer. In that prayer he asks three questions that caused him to relax and trust God: "God, are You not... did You not... Will You not..." First, "Are You not...?" He reminds himself of who God is. "Aren't You the God who's taking care of everybody? Aren't You in control? Don't You have the power to do anything You want to do?" He reminds himself of who God is.

Second, he reminds himself of what God has done. "Did You not take care of Moses in the past? Did You not...?" Then he says, "Will You not do it again?" God does have a pretty good track record of taking care of us and working things out in His timing. Other ways: Keep in God's word. Give others responsibility. Share the load. As a leader in the ministry, don't make all the mistakes yourself, share them around. Don't feel like you have to do them all yourself. I always tell pastors, at pastor's conference, "Don't make all the mistakes yourself. Let the lay people make some of them." You learn to minister effectively by making mistakes. That's how other people do too.

Humor is another way to relax and trust God. I've found that humor is a tremendous stress reliever in ministry. We believe in taking God very seriously and not taking ourselves very seriously. Proverbs 17:22 "Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It's a slow death to be gloomy all the time." Maturity is the ability to laugh at yourself. The word "humor" and the word "humility" come from the same root word. The person who doesn't take themselves real serious is a humble person.

I think God intends for us to enjoy life. In Timothy, he says, "God has richly provided us with all things for our enjoyment." You don't have to wait until you get to heaven to enjoy life. People ask me, "Do you ever get tired of the ministry?" The honest truth is, no I don't. I get tired in the ministry. But I never get tired of the ministry. I can be tired in it from things I've done, all the work, but never tired of it. Why? I try to keep a light attitude. Nothing great is ever accomplished without enthusiasm. And that's relaxing and trusting God.

Thursday, August 20, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #81

LEADERSHIP VOW #4. AS A LEADER I WILL BE AN ENCOURAGER.

Romans 14:19 says, “*Let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*” Notice the word “edification”. Edification is a simple word that means “to build up”. An edifice is a building. The point here is that leaders build people up rather than tearing them down. If I’m going to be a leader, I’m going to be a builder upper of people not a tearer downer of people! I’m going to be an encourager not a discourager.

What are some ways that we can build people up? Be sensitive to others needs; see their positive side; spend time one-on-one; give people praise; include them in all that’s going on; give them responsibility. People respond to responsibility. But if you treat people like babies, you’ll have to diaper them the rest of your life. In your ministry, let people share. Share the credit, the control, the creativity. Involve other people. Listen to people. When you’re listening, you’re loving. You’re loving people with your ears every time you listen to somebody. It says, “You matter and I’m paying attention to you. I value what you have to say.” Listening is a ministry.

How about being optimistic about their potential? Look beyond the problems and look at their potential. Every human being is a bundle of problems and potential. So it’s what you choose to look on. “Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.” People tend to live up to our expectations. When you expect them to do well, they do. We tend to live up to the expectations of others. Focus on their potential, not just their problems.

I believe that Christian leaders, you, are dispensers of hope. That’s what it means to be a Christian leader. You’re a dispenser of hope. You bring hope into a hopeless situation. You help people who seem to be helpless. You say, “You can do it.” If God’s for us who can be against us? We value that positive enthusiasm.

Friday, August 21, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #82

LEADERSHIP VOW #5. AS A LEADER I WILL BE A PEACEMAKER.

Ephesians 4:3 says, “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*” One of the things leaders are called to do is make every effort to reduce conflict. We are in a society and in a world that is filled with conflict. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers.*” How do you do that? How can you make peace? As a leader, how can I be a peacemaker in my home? My marriage? My workplace? My church?

Simple: Put others before yourself. Stop gossiping! How do you stop gossips? One, you just don’t pass it on. Two, you challenge it when you hear it. You call it for what it is. Somebody starts in and you say, “Isn’t that gossip?” That will cut it quick. Nobody likes to be caught at gossiping. And just being a non-gossiper and pointing it out when it is gossip is being a peacemaker.

One of the things you have to do as a leader, if you’re going to be a leader, is you must learn to tolerate diversity. Not everybody is like you and you have to tolerate different personalities in your ministry and recognize that people who have a different personality than you can still make a contribution to the ministry.

One of the things we teach at COV is we value every individual. We respect diversity. We want unity, not uniformity. You can walk hand-in-hand without seeing eye-to-eye on every issue. God doesn't want uniformity where we're all cookie-cutter Christians. We all act the same way. That would be so boring. But God loves diversity. There's strength and power in diversity. As a leader, you must learn to tolerate that and learn to make peace between people who can't tolerate it. Or at least keep them apart. You can have differences without having division. So we respect people, we appreciate the people God's created. We believe everybody's important. We appreciate their efforts. Be a peacemaker. Great people make people feel great. We don't use people. We don't manipulate them. We respect their personal preferences. We meet people where they are and try to know them by name.

As a peacemaker you want to give three things to people. The Triple A Treatment: Attention, Affirmation, and Appreciation. You want to give everybody Attention. We want to give everybody Affirmation. We want to give everybody Appreciation. If you do that in your ministry, it will explode with growth. People are hungry for attention, affirmation and appreciation. The ministry leader who involves people in a ministry and then gives attention, appreciation and affirmation will not have any problem with the ministry being done.

1 Corinthians 12:5 (JB) says, *"There are all sorts of services to be done but always the same Lord working in all sorts of different ways in different people."* There is a common purpose in our church, different ways of doing it.

Romans 15:7 *"Accept one another then just as Christ accepted you."*

Philippians 2:2 *"Live in harmony together. Live together in love as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you."*

God can overlook lack of programs, a financial tightness, and recession. He can overlook a lack of ability. But one thing God will not overlook in a church is He does not bless the church that is divided. So one of the key jobs of leadership is to promote the unity of the church. Ten times in the first five chapters of Acts it says "they were in one accord... they were in one place ... they were all together... they were of one heart..." When you have the unity of Acts, you have the power of Acts. The Bible teaches very clearly that anything that causes disunity is disruptive and destroys the fellowship and it should not be tolerated. We're to be peacemakers.

Saturday, August 22, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #83

LEADERSHIP VOW #6. AS A LEADER I WILL NEVER STOP GROWING.

2 Peter 1:5-8 says, *"Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; to goodness, knowledge; to knowledge, self control; to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive."*

Notice he gives all these character qualities because character is the bottom line. Add to your faith. That means keep going. Goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Learning is to be the lifestyle of leadership. The moment you think you've got it all, that you know it all, you're dead in the water. You must never stop growing. Growing ministries require growing leadership. Growing marriages require growing spouses. Growing families need to be led by growing parents.

What's one way that I can grow as a leader? Have mentors. Get a discipliner. Timothy had his, Paul. Elisha had Elijah. The twelve disciples had Jesus. Solomon had David. You get somebody who's older in the Christian faith and get them to be a mentor to keep you growing, to keep you stimulated. Everybody needs a mentor and a model. Mentors can give you advice. Models can show you how to do it. You can also have heroes. I would suggest that you not have any living heroes. The jury is still out on everybody until they die. It's ok to have heroes who are dead because now you know they couldn't do anything worse. You should have dead heroes but living models and living mentors. Don't try to have any dead mentors. They can't help you very much.

The point is you never stop growing, you keep learning. You keep developing. Proverbs 19:8 *"He who loves wisdom loves his own best interest and will be a success."* If you love learning, you love wisdom, you love to keep growing, and you will be a success.

Sunday, August 23, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #84

There are only six verses in the New Testament that start with the phrase – *"Make Every Effort"*. There are seven days in a week. Below is one more devotion on leadership. It's a lengthy one.

When you look at people in the Old Testament who made an impact, it's hard to find anybody who made a greater impact than Moses. He freed a nation from slavery after 400 years. He was used by God to give us the Ten Commandments. He wrote the first five books of the Bible. Few leaders have made as great an impact with their lives and ministry as Moses. God used Moses in a tremendous way. Why? Why of all the people did God choose him?

I think that God chose Moses because of the choices Moses made. Moses made four critical choices that determined his destiny and they're choices that each of us as leaders in the church has to make in order to be used by God in a great way. Choices determine your character. Your character is determined by day to day decisions and problems and issues that you are confronted with. And when you make the choice on those daily issues the accumulative effect of those produce the character in your life.

As we look at the life of Moses there are four questions I believe every leader must ask. They are the Identity question, the Responsibility question, the Priority question, and the Difficulty question. When you settle these issues in your life, you are in a position for God to use you in ways like you never thought possible. We're going to look at these four questions and see how Moses answered them, because his answers are the answers that we need to come up with.

1. The first question is what I call the IDENTITY QUESTION.

Every leader must first ask the question, Who am I? This was especially essential for Moses since he had an identity crisis early on. He was born Jewish and yet he was raised Egyptian in Pharaoh's palace. As he grew up he had to decide, What am I *really*? This was going to have a major consequence in his life. In fact it would affect the rest of his life. Here was his choice: He could pretend that he was Pharaoh's grandson in which, if he accepted that he would have fame, he would have fortune, he would have a luxurious lifestyle, he would have a great career. Or, on the other hand, he could admit his Jewish roots and if he did, he would be disgraced, humiliated, thrown out of the palace and forced into slave labor.

If you were confronted with those two choices, what choice do you think you would make? Moses did not hesitate, but he made the choice to admit exactly who he was, to confirm the identity that God had given him because he was a man of integrity. He refused to live a lie. He made his decision that affected the rest of his life.

In Hebrews 11 where we have the story of Moses, v. 23-27, in v. 24 it says, *"By faith, Moses, when he had grown up refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter."* The word "refused" there in Greek literally means "to reject." It means to disown, no turning back, slam the door shut and put a dead bolt on it. So Moses refused to live a lie. He insisted on being what God made him to be. And no amount of peer pressure could sway him from that.

This is very important because this is the first issue you have to deal with as a leader. The point is, God made you for a purpose. And only you can be you. As I've said many times before, when you get to heaven, God isn't going to say, "Why weren't you more like Billy Graham? Why weren't you more like John MacArthur? Why weren't you more like...?" He's going to say, "Why weren't you more like you?" Only you can be you. You are one in five billion. There's never been anyone like you. If you don't be you, who's going to be you?

The point is, God made you for a purpose and being successful equals being me – being yourself. That's the first foundation. Quit trying to be like everybody else. I know when I first entered into the ministry; I had a deep desire to mimic the models in ministry that I admired. I tried to preach like them, I tried to dress like them, I tried to use words and phrases, even hold my Bible the way they did. But I eventually discovered that was ineffective. The only thing I could be that God could use was to be me. So quit trying to be like anybody else.

There's a great relief when you accept your identity. God chose your genes, your parents, your background, your makeup. Job 10:8 says "God formed and shaped me." Settle the issue of identity – Who am I?

2. The second question you must answer as a leader is the RESPONSIBILITY QUESTION.

The responsibility question is this: **What will I do with my life?** You have to stop making excuses, you have to stop blaming other people and take the initiative if you're going to be a leader and decide what God wants you to do with your life and then get on with it.

Hebrews 11:25 "He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." It says, "he chose". Circle that word. I think that, next to salvation, the greatest gift that God has given you is the ability to choose. He's given you the freedom to choose. That's why we're different than animals. God made us in His image and we have the freedom to choose. As a leader, your leadership will be based on the type of choices you make. That is the responsibility question. What will I do with my life? What will I do with my ministry? Your future is determined by your choices.

Notice three things in Moses' life that are issues that each leader must eventually deal with. God's will explodes in your life when you make the right choices and say "Based on what You made me to be, then I'm going to accept responsibility for that and I'm going to make the right choices." Notice three things:

v. 24 we have Moses refusing. In v. 25 we have Moses choosing. See the difference? First there's the negative, then there's a positive. God always backs up a negative with a positive. The Christian life is not just a matter of don'ts. It's not a matter of "I'm not going to do this... this ... this..." It's a matter of "I am choosing to do this." He's refusing and then he's choosing.

v. 23, as a child, God chose Moses. But in v. 25, Moses had to choose God. Big difference. God chose Moses even before he was born to be the liberator, the savior, the deliverer of the nation of Israel. He chose him even before he was born. But Moses could have short-circuited that plan by not choosing God.

So God has chosen you for ministry. John 15, Jesus says, "You have not chosen Me. I have chosen you that you should go forth and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain." God chose you from the foundation of the world. He chose you to be saved and when He chose you to be saved, He chose you to be a minister. But you must make the choice yourself to choose God's will for your life.

Notice in v. 24 it says "When he had grown up." You might underline this. "When he had grown up, he chose." One of the marks of maturity is when you begin to accept responsibility for your spiritual life. As a baby, it was ok for Moses to live off his parents' faith. But someday he had to make the decision on his own of who was going to be his God and what were going to be his values and what was going to be his identity. Leaders recognize three very important truths and they're all illustrated here in the life of Moses.

1. The first truth that every leader must recognize is I can't live off someone else's spiritual commitment. That's a difference between a leader and just an average person. When I meet people on planes, etc. and they find out I'm a pastor they'll say, "My parents were Christians." Whoopee! Or, "My uncle was a missionary ... My wife's a believer." You need a personal relationship to Christ and you need a personal ministry. You don't get into heaven on somebody else's spiritual apron strings and you don't serve in ministry on someone else's spiritual commitment. It's time to grow up and make that choice. I can't live off other's spiritual commitment.

2. I can't blame others for the direction of my life. We are in a society that wants to blame everybody else for everything. There are things that you cannot control and there are things that we've all been victims of, some of you in serious, major issues. And while you cannot control all the things that happen to you, you can control your response. And that's your choice. That is your choice because God's given you that freedom of choice. So don't blame the environment for your future. You are as spiritual as you want to be. When you cut through it all, you're as close to God as you want to be. If you say, "I'm not very close to God. Why?" It's because you don't want to be closer. You're as close to God as you want to be. It's your choice. God has no favorites in His family. He does have intimates – those who know Him well. Who are those? Those who chose to make the effort to know Him well, when you choose to make the effort through Bible reading, through quiet time, through prayer. You get to know somebody well when you spend a lot of time with them. The more time you spend with God the more you become an intimate of God. The Bible says in Psalms that the people of Israel knew the acts of God but Moses knew the ways of God. The people saw the acts of God. They saw the fire, the pillar, the water, the spreading of the Red Sea. They saw all the acts of God. But Moses knew the ways of God because he was God's friend. Did God love Moses more? No. Moses made choices that others were not willing to make. You are as close to God as you want to be.

3. I'm free to choose my response to life. Nobody can ruin my life except me. God won't ruin it. The devil can't, if you're a child of God unless you make choices. So it's your choice. Even what other people do to you. Nobody can ruin your life except you if you've given it to God.

So the responsibility issue is, what am I going to do with my life? Joshua 20:4 “*You may choose for yourself today whom you will serve, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*” He's saying I'm facing the same issue that Moses had. Joshua was his successor. Joshua watched Moses be a man of choice, be a man of character, a man of integrity. He saw it work and years later he's making the same decisions. He's saying, as for me and my house, I don't care what you guys think; we're going to serve the Lord.

3. The third issue is what I call the PRIORITY QUESTION that every leader must eventually face and we see it in Moses' life.

The Priority Question is this: **What is really most important?** If you're going to be used effectively by God you've got to establish some kind of value system. You clarify your values, your morals, your ethics, and your priorities. This is what Moses did. He decided what was important. v. 26 “*He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward.*” Notice the word “regarded” which means I made a moral choice, a value judgment. And circle the word “value”. It says he considered, he regarded. The word “regarded” literally means “evaluate”. It's the word that's used of weighing in the balance. It means to judge the value of something. This is not something you do quickly, a snap judgment. You are seriously considering, what is the direction of my life and what are going to be my values?

If you were asked by somebody, “What are the values that you are basing your life on?” Could you name them? You ought to be able to say, these are things that are important to me. We've just talked about ten of them on Sunday morning. You don't lie, you don't steal, those kinds of things. Basic values of life. The fact is, if you don't decide what's important in your life, other people will do it for you. They will decide what's important and they will force their values on you.

We, in America, are right now in a values war. Don't let anybody kid you about it. We are in a values war. The media is on the wrong side. When Kim Kardashian makes the cover of *Newsweek* that is sheer pornography that says something is happening in our society. They may put down the idea, but there is a values war. And we know who's behind it. (It's not the Democrats.) It's Satan. He is the god of this world and he is trying to warp the world to his value system.

What is the world's value system? The world's value system is summed up in these three verses. The only good thing you can say about the devil is he's consistent. He doesn't have any new tricks. The same three tricks he pulled on Adam, he pulled on Jesus. The same three tricks he pulled on Jesus, he pulled on Moses. They're the same three he pulls on you. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the world, and the pride of life. We see these in v. 24, 25, and 26. Which is the world's value system.

v. 24 *"Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter."* He's talking about power and prestige. That's the first value of the world. Power and prestige. One of the values of the world is, I want to be famous, and I want to be looked up to. I want power. I want prestige. Why else would people pay fifty bucks for a card that's gold when they can have one that's green that doesn't cost that much. People want to have a certain color card so they can say, I have prestige. I have power.

The second standard of the world is in v. 25. Pleasure. *"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than joy the pleasures of sin for a short time."* In v. 24 he rejects the world's measure – they're standard of evaluation, being famous. In v. 25 he rejects the world's pleasure.

In v. 26, he rejects the world's treasure which is possessions. Power, pleasure, possessions; Measure, pleasure, and treasure. *"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasure of Egypt."* All of the wealth of the world in that day was concentrated in Egypt. And it would have been Moses. He was in line for it. And he walked out the door from a position of prestige (the measure of the world), all the pleasures of the world he could have in the palace of Egypt, and he rejected the world's treasure – the world's value system.

It's ironic. Those things were all offered to Moses and by these standards Moses had it made. But he walked away from it. It's interesting to me that he walked away from the very three things that most people spend their entire lives trying to get. He walked out the door. That's why God used him. He knew that these things don't last.

This is very important. You must understand that as a leader in ministry, in order for you to say, Yes, to God there are things you must say No to. You cannot say yes to the world and yes to ministry at the same time. It doesn't work. Jesus said it like this, *"You can't serve two masters. You'll either hate one or love the other."* The problem with a lot of Christians is not that they're not willing to serve in ministry but it is that they're afraid to say no to the world's value system. Compromising only makes you miserable. It's like trying to sit on a fence. Ouch! You need to learn to say no. I refuse to be sucked in again. I'm going to go against the flow. I'm going to reject what the world says is important.

The priority question of what is really important? And Moses rejected the world's standard and instead came up with his own value system. What was Moses' value system?

1. God's purpose is more valuable than popularity.

As Pharaoh's grandson, the heir to the throne, that's a position of popularity. But Moses wasn't impressed. Don't ever sell your life out for popularity because it doesn't last. One minute you're a hero, the next minute you're a zero. It just doesn't last. One of the things you have to learn as a leader is to hold in your hand lightly both praise and criticism. Because one minute they love you and the next minute they hate you. One minute you're doing great and the next minute you're doing lousy. You must learn, if you're going to be effective in ministry, to live for an audience of one. Really what matters is, "What does God think about this?" You cannot play to the crowds.

I make people happy all the time and I upset people all the time. It's par for the course. The pioneer takes the arrows. If you're going to call the shots, you take the shots. You hold both criticism and praise lightly. Like chewing gum: You chew on it but you don't swallow it.

2. People are more valuable than pleasures.

v. 25. Moses is on Easy Street. He's got a royal lifestyle. Any whim he wants is going to be satisfied. Immediately. But in order to do right, he had to choose discomfort over pleasure. Do you realize that all the discomfort we've been through in this church in 13 years using 54 different buildings, all the discomfort of setting up and taking down? Saying, I want to have a ministry without discomfort is like saying, I want to have a baby without my tummy getting big and going through labor. It's impossibility. It's par for the course.

Notice why did he give up for people. v. 25 He chose to be mistreated "... along with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasure of sin for a time." He did it for the sake of people. He said I want to do this to help others. That's why we put up with inconvenience in ministry – to help others. That's called service. The problem is a lot of people only want to serve God when it's convenient. But a lot of ministry isn't convenient. A lot of ministry isn't exciting. It's just ministry, service.

3. God's peace is more valuable than possessions.

He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater value than the treasure of Egypt because he was looking ahead. Moses knew that no possession could give inner peace. Peace comes from doing God's will.

It's amazing that Moses gave up the very things we spend our lives trying to get. What motivated this man? V. 26 "He was looking ahead to his reward." The reasons that he was able to have his values right – values are determined by perspective. Or your values are determined by your vision. And Moses was a man of vision. So he had his eyes on the future reward, not on the measure, treasure, pleasure of today.

4. That brings us to the fourth crisis in Moses' life and the fourth issue that all of us must deal with and the fourth question that all of us must answer as leaders in ministry. That is what I call the DIFFICULTY QUESTION.

How much am I willing to commit? How much am I willing to commit to fulfill my ministry? Ministry requires perseverance. V. 27 "By faith Moses left Egypt not fearing the king's anger. He persevered because he saw him who is invisible." He never took his eyes off the goal. That's why God used him. He persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

You must constantly visualize your goal. By the way, visualization is not a New Age word. It's a Biblical word. It all depends on what you're visualizing. If you're visualizing your navel then that's New Age. If you're visualizing some crystal, that's New Age. But don't let anybody take meditation and visualization out of scripture. That's what the Bible says is the way you get close to God – by meditating on God's word.

Constantly keep the Lord and His will before you. The secret of success is persistence. The secret of persistence is vision. Keeping your eyes off the problem and on to the final goal. I used to have a poster in my office that said, "Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the goal." There are incredible obstacles in ministry. We've faced incredible obstacles as a church. Moses refused to give up no matter what happened and that's why God used him. God uses people who don't give up. If I had to summarize Moses' ministry in one word it would be endurance. Imagine: forty years in Midian being a nobody and then forty years of leading the children of Israel across a wilderness that should have only taken a couple of weeks – a bunch of crybabies who were griping about everything that happens. A thankless job.

2 Corinthians 4 "These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won't last very long, yet in this short time of distress will result on God's richest blessings upon us for ever and ever. So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over but the joys to come will last forever."

When you look at Paul's ministry, if you were to turn a few chapters over, he gives a testimony and says, "Five, six, seven times I was whipped and shipwrecked and I've been beaten and stoned and I've been left in prison without food and I've had no clothes and I've been run out of town. And I've died once and come back to life..." Then he says, "These troubles and sufferings are quite small." That's what you call perspective. In the long shot, the long haul - 70, 80, 90 years of trouble is nothing compared to millions of years in heaven. Keep your perspective in all of this.

If you want to make your life count, you've got to make the right choices. Because the choices determine your character and God uses people of character and it begins with these issues.