

CHAPTER ONE

Owning Up

The gravel crunched and popped under my tires as I wheeled into the parking lot ten minutes late. I raced to the door on my tiptoes to keep the stones from butchering the heels of my shoes.

Another early morning meeting. Another day with too much to do and too little time. As the leader of a mushrooming pregnancy ministry, I was exhausted. Was there no end to meetings? No end to committees? No end to ever-widening ripples of responsibility?

Once inside, I slipped into a small room and joined the executive committee. They were already praying with the guest speakers for our networking meeting. After discussing the flow of the morning, we went into the main area to greet the forty leaders, pastors, and counselors who'd gathered. I shook a few hands as I made my way across the gymnasium à la conference hall for my third dose of caffeine.

The speakers, Keith Yoder and Don Riker, announced their topic as “True Mental Health,” explaining that as leaders, we were designed to function with Jesus on the throne of our lives and ministries. Keith said to whatever extent He's not, we're off center, off balance.

Well, something was definitely off in me.

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I shifted in my chair, trying to stave off the conviction seeping into my spirit.

My justification went like this: Please don't tell me there's yet another leadership skill I need to acquire! I'm already depending on God the best way I know how. I'm up at dawn seeking God, and I run as fast and smart as I can all day long. It seems to be working quite well, thank you very much. The ministry is flourishing and growing. Young couples facing unintended pregnancies are coming to the Lord. Babies are being saved. Plus, our effectiveness has garnered national recognition among pregnancy center ministries.

Still, I knew something was wrong.

When the teaching came to a close, Keith and Don offered to pray for us individually. They placed a few chairs at the front and explained that as God led us to come forward, they would ask the Lord to give them insight and wisdom for us.

Now, these were no ordinary men. They were seasoned servants of God who counseled and mentored senior pastors, ministry leaders, and boards of directors. They were highly regarded and respected by everyone in the room. And they were skilled in discerning the Spirit's wisdom. You'd think that would have made me eager for prayer. But absolutely not.

As much as I knew I needed prayer, I didn't want to receive it in front of five of my staffers who were also at the meeting. What if Keith and Don tuned in to whatever was off-kilter in me? What if they prayed it out loud in front of everyone?

Oh no-ho-ho! There was no way I was going to sit in one of those chairs up front. At least not until every last staffer was prayed for and well on her way to lunch.

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That would've been a great plan if my staff had actually *left* after receiving prayer. To my chagrin, they all hung around.

A quick scan of the room revealed two things: I was one of only a few who hadn't gone forward, so if I wanted prayer, my window was closing; and my five ministry comrades were perched on the edge of their seats, looking my way. Oh, brother. There was no getting out of this. I pushed aside my pride and took my place on one of those chairs.

The words I was about to hear would dislodge the cornerstone of my leadership.

You see, for thirteen years I'd led the ministry as a lone ranger. I wasn't a loner per se. I was an encourager by nature and good at identifying and cultivating the various abilities in my staffers. We had great relationships and strong teams. But when it came to vision and strategy, that was my bailiwick and I basically did it solo. I'd hole up with God to figure out what He wanted us to do, discuss it with the board, and sell it to the staff. Because I was affable, a good motivator, and not a dictator, my leadership worked pretty well. It enabled the ministry to hum along without a hitch.

The only hitch seemed to be within me. The weight of it all, the ruthless schedule, the possibilities for expansion that stretched beyond Neptune—call it what you want, it was overwhelming. I was giving my best to the ministry, and it was getting the best of me.

Maybe my words are ringing a few bells for you. Can you relate to being not just hurried but harried? Having not just busy seasons but chronic busyness? Expanding not just your organization but your job description? Filling a leadership role not just in your organization but regionally, even nationally? Feeling not just

occasionally fatigued but regularly exhausted? Having a schedule that's not just full but bleeds into your evenings and weekends?

After all, isn't that what leaders do? We stop the buck. We work hard and stay late. Our car is last to leave the lot. Our dinners are reheated well after our families have eaten. Not every night, but too many nights.

Keith and Don tapped into an unexpected perspective from the Lord.

“Lisa, we look at the ministry you're serving in, and we wonder, can it get any more successful?” Keith observed. “And there's a sense of excellence and God's favor upon the ministry. And in the midst of that, God is calling you to draw even closer to Him, to spend more time in prayer, seeking and discerning how things are to be done. This will lead to a place of deeper intimacy with God. When you consult with other ministries, this is what you will pass on.”

Initially I didn't grasp Keith's point. In my view, we already walked closely with God. We prayed together as a board and staff. And we also provided consultation for other ministries.

Don picked it up from there. “I sense a warning with this, though, Lisa. You as a person and as a ministry—the board, the staff, even some of the volunteers—have been running hard for a long time. A weariness has crept in that will hinder your hearing from God. There needs to be a rest. Not just a week or two off work but a shift into a posture of rest. Entering into His rest. You will find far more effectiveness as you learn this. And it will transform the organization.”

I stepped away from the chair not knowing what to think or how to feel. On one hand, the success of the ministry was acknowl-

edged. So that was good. But on the other hand, the weariness cat was out of the bag. On second thought, I knew how I felt. Miffed. Their prayers felt like a rebuke, an exposure of my weakness.

I hurried out of the room, inviting one of my staffers to join me for lunch at a nearby restaurant. We'd barely opened our menus when I blurted out, "Cindy, do I seem weary to you? I mean, I know I've been extra busy, but I think I'm upbeat and ready for any challenge, don't you?"

Cindy was a new staffer and hedged a bit. "Uh, I don't know, Lisa. I guess we're all really busy these days."

Not finding the reassurance I was looking for, I moved on to other topics.

But all afternoon, two words from Keith and Don's prayers honked at me like car horns in a traffic jam. Weary! Rest! Weary! Rest! It felt like a billboard that said "WEARY" was looming over me, threatening to dwarf the persona I'd projected for so long. To me, it was okay to be busy but it wasn't okay to be weary. After all, Scripture exhorted us not to become weary in well-doing.

As much as I wanted to discount the prayer from that morning, I couldn't.

I got home that evening, grabbed my Strong's Concordance from Bible college days, and stood at my desk looking up passages with the word weary in them.

The people are hungry and weary
and thirsty in the wilderness.

—2 Samuel 17:29 NKJV

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Save me, God,
for the waters have threatened my life.
I have sunk in deep mud,
and there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and a flood overflows me.
I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.

—Psalm 69:1–3 NASB

Thirteen years of fast-paced ministry flashed before me. The busy seasons that became year-round. The annual banquet that grew to three back-to-back banquets to accommodate supporters. Same thing with the Walk for Life fundraiser. The opening of additional locations. The conversion to medical clinics so we could provide ultrasound services. The monthly board meetings, monthly staff meetings, biweekly department meetings. The quarterly newsletter and the appeal letters. The daily everything.

My face was wet with tears. As I read those verses, I was reading about myself. I was sloggng through a jungle of excessive busyness. Vines of responsibility were entangling me.

I slumped into my chair and admitted, “I’m weary. Oh my word, I’m weary.” As much as I never wanted to grow weary in well-doing, it had happened. I had worn busyness like a badge of honor—thinking of it as the stripes every good leader earned—and walked straight into a bog of weariness.

I sat there for several long minutes, stunned.

Hmph. There was no denying it, no more justifying or defending myself. I had seen myself in the black-and-white, spirit-and-

truth words of Scripture—that scalpel that can separate joints from marrow, busyness from weariness. I took a deep breath and owned it: I. Am. Weary.

With my leadership MO falling down around me, I remembered the other word Keith and Don prayed about—rest. Desperate for some insight, I looked up more verses.

“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest,” God replied when Moses pleaded with Him to lead them into the Promised Land (Ex. 33:14 NIV).

“Truly my soul finds rest in God,” said a familiar Psalm (Ps. 62:1 NIV).

Verse after verse linked rest with God’s presence.

I get that, I thought. I’ve experienced that. In fact, I regularly experience rest when I’m with the Lord each morning. It’s the best part of the day. My heart is one with His, my tank is filled, and I roar off to work.

And I hoped the same was true for my staff, board members, and volunteers. I pictured them too privately seeking the Lord and finding rest and strength in Him.

But Keith and Don’s prayer suggested we were to rest at work—“a shift into a posture of rest, entering into His rest,” to be exact.

Pardon me, but that is preposterous. Downright irresponsible. Literally impossible. There’s work to be done at work. Duh—I think that’s why they call it work. No one says, “Bye, Hon, I’m going to rest” and then saunters off to the office to hang out with God all day. Seriously. I think we can all agree that we should seek God on our own time and come to work ready to dig in.

Agitation quickly stole the release I'd felt just moments before, when I admitted to being weary. I simply could not comprehend how resting in the presence of the Lord was appropriate for the work setting.

Sure, we all need to combat weariness with restful, replenishing time with the Lord. But just not at work. Period.

But for what it was worth, that night I owned my exhaustion.

You know, admitting to weariness can be anathema to us leaders. We flaunt our busyness and veil our weariness. But it plagues us all.

Anne Beiler, founder of Auntie Anne's Pretzels, says, "I clearly remember the early years of business when I thought doing things unto the Lord meant perfection. The more I had on my plate, the more pleasing I believed I was to God. It also made me feel important. But it created frustration and a decided lack of enjoyment and rest. I'm grateful that through the years, God taught me, held my hand, and walked with me. I learned to honor Him, seek His guidance, and strive for excellence instead of perfection."

"Weariness and burnout are such threats to pastors and church staff that spiritual and physical health are in one of our five staff commitments," says Beau Eckert, senior pastor of Calvary Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. "We state it this way: 'Working hard, resting hard—my family, church, and coworkers need a healthy me.' Burnout doesn't come from just working hard; it comes when we don't also rest hard—with God, with family and friends, with coworkers. Resting isn't just passive inactivity; it's full-on engagement in relaxing, replenishing activity."

A reader poll conducted by Leadership Journal revealed that

nearly 70 percent of respondents were personally familiar with burnout. Here's the breakdown of leaders' answers to the question, Have you experienced burnout in your ministry?

- 18% Yes, I'm fried to a crisp right now.
- 26% Yes, but I'm learning to endure despite the heat.
- 25% Yes, in the past, but I made significant changes and it's gone now.
- 19% I'm not sure if what I had was burnout or something else.
- 12% No, I've never been burned out.

I can relate. I've danced across the hot coals of burnout thinking that if I moved fast enough, it wouldn't harm me.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe you're realizing that the scent of something burning at your church is your own hide. Maybe you're winning the endurance marathon at your ministry but losing the enjoyment. Maybe you're not sure if you're burning out at your business or just fed up with the responsibility, the pressure, the growth, or the nongrowth.

Maybe you've cried out to God, "Is this downward spiral of busyness, exhaustion, and weariness inevitable?" Maybe a good friend has pulled you aside to say, "I don't think God intends for you to live this way."

I know we're not friends yet, but if you'll let me, I'd like to say to you leader to leader, "I don't think God intends for us to live this way." In fact, I know He doesn't.

I know He doesn't, because He's changed the way I live and work. He's taken this type A, overachieving, red-blooded American version of the disciple Peter—I'm a visionary, given to bouts

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of foot-in-mouth disease, touting faith until the water touches my ankles—and He’s essentially said, “I want you to also be like John.” John, “the disciple Jesus loved,” as John so confidently and correctly called himself. John, who was comfortable enough with Jesus to lean back against Him as they conversed over a meal. John, who learned what it meant to be loved and to relax, even as a Son of Thunder.

Jesus is saying to all of us, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30 NKJV).

Jesus’ invitation is the gateway to becoming an unexhausted leader. It’s how I moved from weariness to rest. It’s what transformed our ministry from busyness to an active awareness of God’s presence at work. It’s what drew us into corporate intimacy with God and each other. It’s what replaced our good ideas with God’s far more effective ones. And that’s the story of this book: the unexhausted leader and his or her team thrive in the presence of God, on and off the job.

I am no longer dogged by exhaustion. My view of God continues to expand. I’m deeply impacted by authentic relationships with the board and staff. I’m regularly awed by the specific ways God leads the ministry.

Our ministry has been revolutionized. God is worshiped. He is our recognized leader. His higher ways are guiding the direction and widening the scope of our ministry. He’s giving us fresh, keen insights into our vision and mission. He’s providing powerful strategies to reach people. As the Master Potter, He’s shaping and reshaping us. The list goes on.

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In this book, I'll tell the story of how God changed our culture and increased our effectiveness through the paradigm of the productive pause. I'll lay out its scriptural foundation, identify its three principles, and share examples of everyday revamping and epic revolution in our ministry. And I'll provide practical tools for implementing it in your own setting.

You may be thinking, *This is a stretch. Rest in God's presence in the work setting? There's a time and a place for everything, and the work environment isn't the time or the place for this. Sunday morning comes to mind!*

I know what you mean. I've been there and thought that. When God first indicated this was the direction He wanted us to go, I was bucking and chafing. It went against every work-driven inclination in my soul. But I was wrong. And I was to find out that true productivity is found in relationship with Him—not solely in my well-intentioned efforts.

Or perhaps you're thinking, *This sounds like the perfect culture for a woman's ministry. But I'm a man, and my teams are comprised primarily of men. We think and work differently from women. We're concrete, ambitious, and outcomes-based. I don't think men are designed for this.*

I hear you. And if it weren't for the men at our ministry and at the churches and businesses that thrive in this paradigm, I may be inclined to agree with you.

Looking beyond the anecdotal evidence, I'm convinced of the biblical precedent for this workplace lifestyle. It's the way Jesus related to the Father and carried out His will. It's the way He operated with His disciples. And it's the way the disciples ministered post-ascension.

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As you read this book and begin to function this way with your teams, you will

1. have the joy of giving God the honor He deserves
2. be replenished as your corporate relationship with God flourishes
3. experience deeper relationships and synergy with one another
4. learn to work and rest at God's pace
5. gain increased productivity
6. reap the organizational benefits of team discernment
7. see God at work in your midst in greater ways

There's nothing namby-pamby about this. It doesn't involve sitting around a campfire singing "Kumbaya," and you don't have to be wired like the disciple John. God designed us for mission advancement and intimacy, and He knows how to help us with both, whether we're more like Peter, John, Martha, or Mary.

So whether you're male or female, senior pastor or women's ministry leader, president of your ministry or leader within, CEO of your company or head of a department—if you're inching toward weariness and wondering if it's possible to live as an unexhausted leader, I'm here to say that it is. Engaging with God as a team is the key, and it's absolutely life-changing.