

abound

A call to purposeful
servant LEADERSHIP

Jessie Seneca

I love reading—and writing leadership books. I cannot think of women authors offering leadership books today—bravo, Jessie for venturing into this space. This is a great book on Christian leadership that is not for women only! Jessie does a great job of presenting a Christ-following perspective of biblical leadership. I love her perspective: *The goal of an effective leader involves finding others who have the same passion as you do so that you can build a team that will further your influence and cause together.*

Dr. Hans Finzel

Best-selling author of The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make

When asked for examples of good leaders whom I have been privileged to work with, the person who always comes to my mind first is Jessie Seneca. Each event experience with Jessie and her team has increased my respect for her and has helped me grow personally in my understanding of servant leadership. I believe that Jessie was destined to write *Abound: A Call to Purposeful Servant Leadership* for such a time as this. She has managed to distill a lifetime of learning into four chapters with self-development exercises after each chapter to take readers into a deeper understanding and practical application. This book will certainly be one that I highly recommend and will refer to often!

Sue Landis

PHR, CPEC, speaker, Life & Leadership Coach, business executive

Abound presents a biblical challenge for leaders to keep in step with Christ. It's a call that will stimulate you to refresh your vision and stay current with goals. Jessie shares her heart with transparency and provides practical skills to develop your team. Her example calls leaders to be faithful in service and abound in love.

Jewell Utt

Author, speaker, Women's Ministry Director

Jessie's many years of experience as a leader and servant of God comes through clearly in the wisdom and knowledge given through this book. I am thankful for

the many different aspects to leadership she presents. This book is effective in both our personal relationships with God as leaders and our relationships with those whom we lead. She reminds us that before we lead, we need to follow the One True Leader. She gives us the tools to start or move forward in the places where we have been called. She also gives us practical ideas in dealing with the challenges of leadership. She has structured this book in such a way that it is useful for an individual or a team to work through.

Erin Rypkema

Women's Ministry Leader

Blessed by almost twenty-five years in ministry, I've read tons of great leadership books and articles, but Jessie's book is unique in its approach and scope. It's readable, achievable, applicable, and inspirational; however, it will also become personal as it highlights the significance of what it really means to be a true servant leader. You'll find yourself reading and re-reading this must-read book as it undoubtedly takes its rightful place in your office as a valuable resource reference.

Donna C. Jacobini

Director of Women's Ministry

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To my supportive and encouraging
SHE Leads leadership team:

You make me a better leader
and a more sincere follower
of the greatest leader, Jesus.

A note from the author . . .



*L*ord, we don't need another book on *Leadership*, I thought when the Holy Spirit put this assignment on my heart. So many good books are already circulating on the shelves regarding leadership (which I read and enjoy). But as a leader, you know better than anyone that when the Lord calls you to do something, you'd better do it. If not, He will find a way to make it happen—with or without your cooperation.

This leadership book is a little different than most on the subject. *Abound: A Call to Purposeful Servant Leadership* has four manageable chapters for the busy leader. My hope and prayer is that not only will you work through

this book to better understand your calling and walk, but you will also have the courage to take the leap and build an effective team through the process.

Weekly self-development exercises in each chapter, along with practical insights from noted leaders within their field, will guide you along the way.

These are four suggestions to assist you with choosing your level of participation as you read *Abound: A Call to Purposeful Servant Leadership*.

1. Read the book for yourself.
2. Read the book for yourself and complete the weekly self-development exercises.
3. Read the book with your team.
4. Read the book with your team and complete the weekly self-development exercises.

A more personal note . . .

My earliest recollection of leadership goes back to seventh-grade student government. You know that time in your life . . . when your classmates vote you into student council and you think you have “some” power, but in all reality, the adult adviser calls the shots. It may have been a popularity contest of who was voted in, but nonetheless, I found myself with students from my class, along with the eighth-grade upperclassmen. I wasn’t sure what to expect but found myself loving every minute of it—from managing a small budget and organizing an end-of-year dance to putting together a community project committee.

Since those school years long ago, God has taken me through some amazing times of leadership. Most of those times are wonderful experiences, with a couple of not-so-good encounters scattered throughout. Honestly, the tough experiences have indeed birthed this book and the *SHE Leads* conference. Not that I would wish hardship on anyone, but the difficult encounters are those times when I learned the most about leadership. I have read a lot of books and sat under incredible leaders most of my days, but nothing has impacted me more than spending lonely, gut-wrenching nights on the couch digging into the Word of God to refute a decision, or receiving encouragement to march on from the people who came alongside me.

I know we have to go through some of these difficult times, but I would like to share with you through this book all I have learned and hopefully pass on some good qualities and principles as you dream big, walk out your calling, build and

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

manage your teams, or take the next step to fulfill the work God has laid upon your heart.

This is not just a journey but a pursuit to abound in the work of the Lord. Embrace your call. Walk it out with strength. Take the leap and never stop dreaming.

Journeying with Him,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jessie". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the word.

*“From everyone who has been given much,
much will be required;
and to whom they entrusted much,
of him they will ask all the more.”*
(Luke 12:48)

Table of Contents

A Note from the Author	vii
Chapter One: THE CALL	1
Self-Development Day One: The Call	21
Self-Development Day Two: Timeline	26
Self-Development Day Three: It's Okay To Be a Follower	29
Self-Development Day Four: It Starts with You!	36
Self-Development Day Five: Take Action!.....	40
Chapter Two: THE WALK	43
Self-Development Day One: Your Walk	60
Self-Development Day Two: His Word Is Truth	63
Self-Development Day Three: With Purpose	68
Self-Development Day Four: Focus	72
Self-Development Day Five: Take Action!	76
Chapter Three: THE LEAP	79
Self-Development Day One: Take the Leap.....	95
Self-Development Day Two: God's Timing	99
Self-Development Day Three: Prayer Works!.....	103
Self-Development Day Four: Arise. Fulfill. Go.	107
Self-Development Day Five: Take Action!	109

Chapter Four: THE TEAM	111
Self-Development Day One: Talents and Gifts	133
Self-Development Day Two: Spiritual Gift Survey.....	137
Self-Development Day Three: Spur You On	144
Self-Development Day Four: Encourage.....	149
Self-Development Day Five: Take Action!	154
Notes	157
Meet the Author	161
Jessie Seneca’s Other Titles	162
Order Info	167

Chapter One

THE CALL

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.
(1 Corinthians 15:58)*

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship,
do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
(2 Timothy 4:5)*

You’ve probably heard the phrase, “the call of God,” but maybe you don’t know exactly what it means. Does the Lord still call people, or was that something He did only in biblical times? The answer is yes, God is still in the business of seeking followers. He places many calls on our lives, and they can be wrapped into two types—lifelong and seasonal. The lifelong call God places on our lives is for each one of us to know Him through salvation and sanctification. Regardless of our skills, talents, or titles, God calls us to be transformed into the likeness of His Son through His gift of eternal life.

God always calls us to a Person and a purpose. The Person we are called to is Christ. Being called to Christ requires the second aspect of that call, fixing our eyes on becoming more like Him every day. This likeness encourages the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—to be lived out regardless of our life circumstances. As our relationship with Christ grows through the development of habits of reading the Scriptures, praying, and fellowshiping with other Christians, we begin to establish a greater sense of our identity in Him. With that, God begins to reveal or affirm our seasonal callings, which includes a passion and a people.

God has crafted our hearts uniquely to grab onto different passions. Each person is energized by different situations, roles, or experiences. Some feel energized by teaching, others by writing, and some by entrepreneurship. Regardless, God has created you with a passion. Have you caught hold of it yet?

Chances are, if you're reading this book, you feel that God has not only placed a passion and people on your heart, but also an opportunity to lead within that call. This leadership opportunity may have been placed on you, or it may be something you desired. Either way, you are in a position to influence the people who come with your passion.

That's what this book stems from—my personal desire to lead others well and deepen their understanding of what passion and people God has called them to serve, all the while strengthening their ultimate call to a Person (Jesus Christ), and a purpose (becoming more like Him).

When it comes to the passion and people God has or is calling you to, you may feel that you're in a good place. You're currently living in your passion. It's defined and clear regarding the people you're influencing. Maybe you're still unsure of your passion and who it will impact. Or maybe you've found your passion and people, but you're still waiting on God to open up the right opportunity. Regardless, you feel called to lead.

Throughout this chapter, I'll share the story of my personal leadership call to my passion and people. I'll provide lessons I've learned along the way regarding what servant leadership is, how to wait for your call well, and what it can look like to purposefully pursue the passion to lead that God has set in your heart.

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

For me, I felt called to full-time ministry. However, this call started with my unfortunate personal experience of battling Cushing's syndrome, a rare endocrine condition that is the result of too much of the hormone cortisol in the body. While I was receiving treatment at four different hospitals for four months, a counselor caring for me would pray over me, "*Jessie, someday you will be sharing your experience with others.*" Four years later, while sitting in the audience listening to the speakers at a Women of Faith event in my hometown, the words of that counselor who cared for me in one of the hospitals ran through my mind. It was at that event I felt God calling me into a teaching/speaking ministry. At the time of my illness, it was hard to understand God's will in it all, and even when I felt God's call, I didn't know what it was going to look like. But through years of preparation and many encouraging individuals, today I am enjoying the fruit of my obedience to God through full-time ministry. We'll dissect this more in Chapter Three, "The Leap," so stay with me.

Most of you have probably experienced or viewed from afar how challenging it is to lead effectively. We often hear that a ministry, business, home, or church rises and falls on its leadership. I have even heard it said that people don't leave companies, they leave leaders. *Ouch!*

Good and effective leadership will drive others to stay and want more, not leave. These types of leaders take ownership and live out the mission statements and visions of their organizations every day. I believe that great leadership is ultimately learned. Yes, some are born with an inherent bent toward leading, but even those leaders learn along the way how to develop their skills.

Whether we have titles or not, we're all leaders in some way or another. No matter where you find yourself in this season of leadership in your life, this book is for you.

- The stay-at-home moms or dads managing their families.
- The working person trying to balance it all.
- The leader of a ministry.
- The manager of a business.
- The organizer of an event.
- The president of a company.

I have experienced most of these positions through different stages of my life over the years and have found each one as rewarding as the next. As I look back over the many leadership positions I have held, each one has built upon the next to bring me right where I am supposed to be. Hindsight is a gift because you learn from what has happened in the past, gain understanding for the

Hindsight is a gift because you learn what has happened in the past, gain understanding for the future, and develop better skills to share with those you lead.

future, and develop better skills to share with those you lead.

And through it all, God is bringing you exactly where He wants you—in the grip of His hand, molding you to become a better version of yourself that ultimately reflects Him.

I can remember as far back as the days of seventh-grade student government that kickstarted my love of influencing others, coupled with a desire to make a difference.

From organizing an end-of-year dance and fundraising for a class gift, to putting together a community project committee, I loved it all. Now, fast forward decades later. It truly has been an adventure through personal field trips, learning curves, and great successes.

I couldn't always clearly see that undergoing a particular stage of life was for my benefit, so I wanted to move ahead of God at times. Many lessons were learned through the difficulty, despair, and delay that, in the end, drove me closer to the heart of God. I learned not to despise the preparation but rather embrace the wait, accepting delay for what it is—a delay, *not* defeat.

As I shared earlier, my call into full-time ministry required a waiting period. It ended up being a twelve-year journey from the time God placed that desire in my heart until He actually opened the door. During the waiting period, I would sometimes find myself missing God in the here and now because I was

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

preoccupied with anticipating the next season. I needed to adjust my thinking, look straight ahead at Jesus, and let Him write my story instead of me.

As hard as I wanted to control the plan, I was just along for the ride. Oh yes, He gives us our journey, but you and I create the adventurous ride through decisions, choices, and challenges taken.

I'm not going to sugarcoat it—waiting is hard. But as I look back on those divine moments, I realize now that they became the catalyst of His future design, and I am indeed thankful for all He taught me in the waiting room, which prepared me for each next step.

Consider with me some of the benefits that take place in God's waiting room:

1. **Purpose is clarified.**

While you wait for God to move, don't miss His involvement in your day-to-day activity. He will teach you more about yourself and the purpose He has for you as you seek Him with all your heart. As you work in the calling set before you, each experience will build on the previous one.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.
(Ecclesiastes 9:10)

2. **Patience is developed.**

Sometimes you think that if you can't go right to the big things you so desire, you shouldn't do anything. No, do what is set before you. Be faithful in the small things, and God will build upon them.

*“His master said to him,
‘Well done, good and faithful slave.
You were faithful with a few things,
I will put you in charge of many things;
enter into the joy of your master.’”*
(Matthew 25:21)

3. Anticipation builds.

You tend to appreciate and cherish things the longer you have to wait for them. God gets to display His power in your life to a watching world as His plan unfolds. It will be far greater and beyond all you could ever ask or think.

*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly
beyond all that we ask or think,
according to the power that works within us,
(Ephesians 3:20)*

4. Character is transformed.

During the wait, God molds you into the fullness of your destiny. As I look back at this time in my life, if God had opened the door of opportunity when I thought He should have, it would have been a complete train wreck. Maybe, just maybe, you are not ready and God knows it. He is still molding your character into His likeness so when He does open that door, you will be more prepared to display the qualities depicted in Him.

During the wait,
God molds you into
the fullness of your
destiny.

*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness;
and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control;
and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;
and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.
(2 Peter 1:5-7 NIV)*

5. Intimacy with God increases.

In your period of waiting, you will come to know God in a deeper way. Desire to be the best learner you can be. Seek Him with all your heart, and trust Him to complete what He began.

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

*“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow;
for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

(Matthew 6:33-34)

I believe that when God closes one door of opportunity, He opens another far greater than what you could have ever expected. They may not have been your initial plans, but they were always God’s plans. You just couldn’t see them until He revealed them.

*Delight yourself in the Lord;
and He will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord,
trust also in Him, and He will do it.*

(Psalm 37:4-5)

Each role or position you may have held has had a different purpose, but each one demanded the same commitment—the commitment of being an *All-In*. One who is an *All-In* is dedicated and purposeful while being a follower of the greatest leader, Jesus Christ.

How you lead is determined by how well you follow. The greatest leaders are the closest followers of the one true Leader. Jesus wants servant leaders to be followers first. Contemporary observers of leadership also acknowledge the need for a leader to be a follower. Douglas K. Smith, acknowledged as one of the world’s leading management thinkers and advisers, has written,

In the twenty-first-century organization, all leaders must learn to follow if they are to successfully lead . . . Leaders at all levels and in all situations must pay close attention to situations in which their most effective option is to follow—not because the hierarchy demands they “obey,” but because performance requires them to rely on the capacities and insights of the other people.¹

Max DePree, son of D. J. DePree, founder and later CEO of Herman Miller office furniture company, claims that being a good follower is important training to become a good leader. “If one is already a leader,” he writes, “the lessons of following are especially appropriate. Leaders understand the essential contributions as well as the limitations of good followers.”² Leaders must grasp the skills involved with following if they would contribute to those seeking to reach the goal with them.

Following is at the core of being a servant leader. The word “disciple” means “learner.” In Jesus’ day, disciples literally followed their teacher around as they learned from him. To learn from Jesus means to follow Jesus. The church today, however, seems to be more interested in those who are ambitious to lead than in those who are willing to follow. Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, makes this observation about the church’s obsession with leadership when the overwhelming emphasis in the Scriptures is about following:

It should surprise us that so much is said about leaders and so little about followers, especially among Christians committed to the Bible. The Bible says comparatively little about leadership and a great deal about follow-ship. Jesus did not invite Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become leaders immediately. He said, “Follow Me.”³

Jesus called His disciples to follow Him. They became leaders only after Jesus empowered them to lead by insisting they follow Him first.⁴ Not only must we follow Christ first, but God also places earthly leaders in our lives for us to follow—some good and others not so much. Regardless, our ability and willingness to follow will make us more effective leaders as we learn, grow, and mature under others’ leadership.

So, let’s start with whom you are following. Is Jesus your first leader? Or, has He taken a backseat in your daily to-do’s of leading? Which earthly leaders has He placed in your life? What does their influence on your life look like? Let’s examine these thoughts further as I share some of my personal journey with you.

I recall a time when God opened a door of opportunity to something that I thought would be the most amazing experience. And yes, it started out that way.

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

But soon after that, it slowly started to spiral out of control to the point that I stepped away one week out from the event, along with a few others.

Leadership styles looked very different from the time I began the quest. It was an eighteen-month commitment that didn't end the way I expected. Or, was it exactly what God ordered?

I vividly remember coming home from the meeting after I resigned and walking into a dark house. My husband had already been tucked into bed for many hours. Honestly, I didn't have the heart to wake him, especially since he had pleaded with me six months prior to step away. These were his exact words: "You will pull out one week before the event."

I thought to myself, *Whaaat? No way. I am doing this for God and not for man. I can do this for the betterment of our community and local women.* So, I marched on

That heartbreaking night when I resigned, I took my spot on the family room couch and vowed to never do ministry again. *Never*, I said to myself.

The long night soon came to an end with the breaking of dawn. The following days were difficult, but the presence of God and a few friends helped me to continue ahead and hold my head above water.

The event came and went, and if you are wondering, I did attend the event along with 4,800 other women. It was a success, and our community was forever changed by His spoken word. So, what man meant for harm, God meant for good.

I'm sharing this story with you because it is the linchpin to that which I learned the most about leadership: what not to do and who not to be. Yes, through a bad experience, God used all of it—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

This experience drove me to wholeheartedly seek my biggest influencer, Jesus Christ.

It changed the trajectory of whom I followed and how closely I followed. It became more about pleasing God rather than pleasing man. Once I refocused my sight and fixed my eyes back on Him, the author and perfecter of my faith, there was clarity. Yes, Jesus is the example, but He will also surround you with others to encourage you, teach you, and keep pointing you to Him.

The silver lining of this experience was having a dear acquaintance-turned-mentor rise up to come alongside me and spur me on. She was a true portrait

of what servant leadership looked like in the midst of chaos. On the day of that challenging event I just shared with you, she was the one who viewed me across the field on my morning walk. After pulling over and parking her PT Cruiser, she walked over to me and cupped my face in her hands to speak truth into my aching heart. She was the one who could see potential in this young woman when I could barely see two feet in front of me. I learned the heart of Jesus and the power of servant leadership. The more time I spent with her, the more I fell in love with Jesus.

Not only was my relationship with Christ transformed, but I learned that whom you follow matters. Do they direct you to Jesus or themselves?

Are they “*I am here*” or “*There you are*” kind of people?

In other words, do they lead their followers selfishly, or selflessly?

Through this experience, I was blessed to sit under this woman’s selfless leadership for nearly nine years before she relocated due to a job change. Then, I watched her leadership skills from a distance.

Additionally, others have purposefully and effectively poured into my life through different positions they’ve held, which was instrumental in developing my leadership style: first, to lead myself well, and then to help lead others to a deeper understanding of their calling. I learned that a call to purposeful leadership starts with you and flows down to those you lead.

Consider the following four ways a leader can pursue purposeful leadership:

1. Walk in a manner worthy of your calling (Ephesians 4:1).
2. Fulfill the ministry set before you (2 Timothy 4:5).
3. Abound in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).
4. Live fruitfully (Mark 4:20).

Walk in a manner worthy of your calling

One day I was listening to a radio show that featured Pastor Chip Ingram from Venture Church in California, who was teaching on Ephesians 4:1, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling with which you have been called.” He broke down *calling* like this: we are all called to a Person and a Purpose, but our Passion and People groups are different. As we established at the beginning of this chapter, the Person is Jesus

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

Christ. This is the main point of the “calling” in this verse: we are all called to the same purpose, which is to emulate Jesus Christ’s character. However, we have a different People group that we influence, as well as a different Passion that grabs our hearts. I influence people whom you will never influence, and you influence others who would never know me or listen to me. Yet the goal of an effective leader involves finding others who have the same Passion as you do so that you can build a team that will further your influence and cause together.

Are you purposefully fulfilling your calling to Jesus to love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind—to seek Him first? When you lead yourself well in these categories, others will notice, and you will lead by example. Your daily worship of Him will become a lifestyle worthy of duplicating. Indeed, true servant leadership begins when the leader humbles himself to carry out the mission entrusted to him rather than his own personal agenda.⁵

In the Book of Haggai, the prophet Haggai approaches Zerubbabel, who led the first group of captives from the Babylonian exile back to Jerusalem in 538-539 B.C. After confronting the leadership about the Israelites living in luxury while the house of the Lord lays desolate, Haggai then exhorts Zerubbabel to challenge the people to consider their ways.

While studying this portion of the Scriptures, we also are challenged to consider our ways. Do we just take care of our outward appearance with no regard to what God has entrusted to us, or do we treasure the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ left us when He ascended back to His Father? Yes, you and I house this gift in earthen vessels.

Consider your ways. Put Him first and everything else of value will find you, even your calling. When you release your dreams and desires to the One who planted them in your heart, He will be able to work with a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the Master of the house, and ready for every good work (2 Timothy 2:21).

Fulfill the ministry set before you

In 2 Timothy 4:5, Paul encourages his young protégé, “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” We are called to act in a clear-minded way with our decision making and judgments,

deal with or accept unpleasant situations, continually share the gospel, and fulfill our call.

Fulfill your calling, not someone else's. God wants you to be purposeful with what He has put in front of you, along with the gift that He has bestowed upon you. At times, we can get caught up in someone else's calling, thinking it's ours to take on. And the truth is, that call is the furthest thing from the heart of God for you. It may be for the other person, but not for you. Once you are able to take your eyes off of another person's calling and focus on what God wants you to accomplish in and through you, you will live a more satisfied and purposeful life.

My husband always says to me, "*Jessie, stay in your lane.*" Staying in your lane keeps your eyes fixed on Jesus and what He wants to accomplish, not what you want to force to happen. It would be remiss of me to say I've never wished for another's calling, or felt slighted because someone was further down the road in a similar calling. But what I learned from that was to be watchful of those who went before me. I watched with purpose and expectancy for what God had in front of me. I tried to take good notes and apply what I learned.

Again, it didn't come without a wait. There is that word again, *wait*. Just as Moses said in Exodus 33:15, "I will not go unless God goes before me," that became my motto. I didn't want to take a step without Him anymore, even if it meant to wait. Then, in Exodus 33:18, Moses continued, "I pray You, show me your glory!" Oh yes, be watchful for His glory with great expectancy. It should all point back to Him, for in Him we live and move and exist (Acts 17:28).

Abound in the work of the Lord

Do you have an Ephesians 3:20 attitude? Do you believe God can do far more above and beyond what you could imagine or think? Indeed, He wants you to live to your fullest potential.

First Corinthians 15:58 tells us, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

First, you need to be steadfast (firmly seated) and immovable (unshaken). When these two qualities are combined within your character, they will propel you, letting nothing shatter your attempt to fulfill your dream, be overcome by

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

your commitment, or take your gaze off the purpose behind the action. You will have the determination it takes as well as the grit needed to do whatever your hand finds to do, so you can do *it* with *all* your might (Ecclesiastes 9:10a).

Second, the phrase, “always abounding in the work of the Lord,” is Paul’s way of saying, “Continually give yourself wholeheartedly to the work of the Lord.” In the Greek, “abound” means “to excel more than; exceed; to overflow.” It is a picture of something flowing over the edge on all sides. As you work unto the Lord, you should not do just enough to get by, but rather as much as you can, always abounding in the work He has entrusted to you.

Some people do just what is expected—the minimum. They sit back and watch things happen. Others, out of love, go far above and beyond what is expected. They pour out their lives to overflowing. These people make things happen. They are *All-Ins!* “All-In doing what?” you ask. “The work of the Lord” is the answer. This is purposeful leadership.

And third, be expectant—*knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord*. Our Lord’s resurrection makes all we do worth doing. And because He sits at the Father’s right hand, He has sent His Holy Spirit to abide in you to give you His divine power (2 Peter 1:3). Paul teaches us that the reality of the future shapes and motivates how we live in the present. It gives us purpose to live beyond our abilities and talents, and subsequently, be fruitful.

No matter where you find yourself in your season of leadership, suffer hardship like a soldier, compete as fairly as an athlete, and work as hard as a farmer (2 Timothy 2:1-6), always abounding in the work of the Lord. Galatians 6:9-10 says, “And so, do not lose heart in doing good, for in due time you will reap if you do not grow weary. So then, while you have opportunity, do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Live fruitfully

While reading through chapter 4 of the Gospel of Mark, I found myself asking multiple questions: *Do my actions represent my beliefs? What does my life produce? Just how good is the good soil of my heart?* Then, as I reached the end of the parable of the sower, I had more questions on this particular portion of the passage, “And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and

they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold” (v. 20).

What and who determines if you bear thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold fruit? For so long, I seemed to be under the impression that God determined the percentage of the fruit born in my life. Yes, to an extent He does because all things are filtered through His hands as He blesses obedience, but the way you hear and receive His Word will measure the *fold* outcome. It is the responsibility of you, the hearer, to move out of the thirty-fold realm into the hundred-fold. *So*, I thought to myself, *what does that actually look like? Are you and I living to our fullest potential? Do we produce a hundred-fold?*

In Mark 4, you read about the four soils: hard, rocky, thorny, and good. What is your soil like?

- Hard = no response to the Word sown
- Rocky = emotional response to the Word sown
- Thorny = worldly response to the Word sown
- Good = fruitful response to the Word sown

We measure everything that we hear. When I hear the Word regarding my situation, I determine whether it is received or not, and to what level it is received. I measure everything that I hear. The Word of God responds to my measuring device. Mark 4:24 says, “The way ‘you’ hear it—the way ‘you’ measure and respond to it—is the measure that it works in your life.” God is not measuring this for you. The man got thirty fold because that is what he heard and responded to. Another man got sixty because that is what he heard and responded to. A thirty-fold mentality never excels to hundred-fold opportunities.⁶ But at the same time, we must remember that apart from Him we can do nothing. We must stay connected to the vine because it is the vine that produces the power, not the branches (John 15).

It has taken me many years to understand the purpose in all I have experienced from that first hospital stay. Yet, as I look back over the past twenty-five years with the six surgeries, including a full left pneumonectomy (lung removal) that had to be performed because of the devastating effects of Cushing’s syndrome, and

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

the many lessons learned from those experiences, I am determined to practice Philippians 1:21-25:

*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me;** and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.*

Fruitful living will require purposeful steps to accomplish all that God has for you. What do you and I need to do to live in the hundredfold, our fullest potential? Below are six ways we can pursue fruitful living.

1. **Receive, Believe, Achieve** - Hear the Word of God (daily), believe it, and then act on it.

*But one who looks intently at the perfect law,
the law of liberty, and abides by it,
not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer,
this man will be blessed in what he does.*

(James 1:25)

2. **Move beyond the past** - Don't allow past attempts, failures, or fears to stop you from moving forward.

*Once you were dead because of your disobedience
and your many sins.
You used to live in sin,
. . . All of us used to live that way,
following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature.
By our very nature we were subject to God's anger,
just like everyone else.*

*But God is so rich in mercy,
and he loved us so much,
that even though we were dead because of our sins,
he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.*
(Ephesians 2:1-5 NLT)

3. **Goal-setter, Goal-keeper** - Make a list of what you want to accomplish, and then set deadlines. Be specific. Yes, God calls us to make plans and create deadlines, but it's important for you to be flexible when He steps in to nudge your direction.

*The plans of the heart belong to man,
but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.
The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.*
(Proverbs 16:1 [NASB], 9 [ESV])

4. **Know your Why** - Know why you are doing what you are doing and be emotionally connected to the action.

*Commit your way to the Lord,
trust also in Him, and He will do it.*
(Psalm 37:5)

5. **Trust God with the outcome** - Do your part as God leads and then allow Him to complete it. Yes, following Jesus means relinquishing control and allowing Him to take the wheel. He will reveal all that you need to know for each step. Trust Him with the outcome. I found myself writing in my journal today, *Give me the wisdom to search Your plans as I walk in Your ways.*

*For we are His workmanship,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*
(Ephesians 2:10)

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord,
plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

(Jeremiah 29:11 ESV)

6. **Make the move** - Pray, pray, pray, and then take the step of faith needed to accomplish all God is calling you to. Hans Finzel, an author of ten books on leadership, says, “Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.” (Stay tuned Chapter Three, “The Leap,” is all about this.)

*Consecrate yourselves,
for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.*

(Joshua 3:5)

*. . . it shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests . . .
rest in the water . . .*

(Joshua 3:13)

As you consider this first chapter, “The Call,” my prayer for you is that you would establish what God has called you to accomplish, and purposefully pursue His call on your life. Enlist others to help encourage you and walk beside you, and fulfill that call with like-minded people. However, if you are still wondering what your call is, it’s okay. Just do what is right in front of you, be committed to the daily reading of God’s Word, and develop His character traits.

But beware: there will be others who will try to stop you from pursuing your dreams. Be careful who you share your dreams, desires, and call with so that you will be able to accomplish all God has set in front of you. We should learn to discern what to reveal and what to retain concerning His personal revelation to us. We need to be sensitive to what God wants to keep between us and Him and what He wants us to share. When the time is right, it will be all about the delivery of the message shared in humility so that God will receive the glory.

The Call

Carl Eschenbach

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As I reflect upon my life, I often think about why I always found myself faced with leadership opportunities. It was not until I really started to follow the Lord that I realized it was He who called me to both lead and serve at the same time. During different stages and seasons of my life, God's calling has taken different shapes and forms, but through it all, His fingerprints are apparent. Allow me to share some of it with you.

God's calling on my life to lead started early in my pre-teen years. I found myself having an opportunity to lead through the different athletic teams I was on. Looking back, I found myself playing the role of motivator and encourager of those around me. Also, I was given captainship over almost every team. Although I was unaware of it then, I now realize this was just the start of what the Lord had in store for me. Leadership—His calling on my life.

With years passing, the next tug I felt about this calling was the Lord speaking to me through someone. It was actually delivered through the author of this book and my sister, Jessie. As I watched her grow stronger in her faith and become an amazing mother and wife, it inspired me to get closer to the Lord as well. As Jessie so accurately stated in this chapter, God can work through those serving Him to bring out your calling of leadership. The Lord has a unique way of using His disciples to bring out His calling for His people.

As I began my professional career, like most people I started as an individual contributor. But, upon reflection, similar to my younger years, I found myself feeling that call to lead again. Now, I knew about leadership, but servant leadership—not so much. I wish I did because I would have led differently earlier in my career. However, with time,

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

I found myself leading in a way that seemed to reflect what I came to know as servant leadership—the idea of leading with the greater good of those around you in mind, having the desire to see others grow, and caring for their needs while pursuing the goal. Once again, I felt this was a clear indicator of God’s calling for me to both lead and serve others well. My challenge was that I was just not connected enough to the Lord to know He was steering me in this direction.

Very early into my professional life, I was given an opportunity to step into management. Based on my experience, I was not deserving of this position. It was one of those situations in life when you say to yourself, “*Be careful what you wish for!*” But, as I began to realize this was the Lord’s calling, it hit me again. This opportunity was not an accident.

As the Lord called me into the corporate world of executive leadership, I continued to stay focused on expanding my servant leadership skills. These skills were tested, challenged, and even questioned (almost daily). There were days I sat at my desk telling myself, *Stay the course and focus on giving more than getting.*

I would often read John 13:12 (KJV) for encouragement as Jesus

reminds His disciples that He has set an example: to serve. “So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?”

What is so powerful about what Jessie wrote in this chapter is that when you serve others, you actually become a disciple to them. You learn as you follow, and then you take your lessons and give them back to your followers. This is exactly what the Lord asks of us. His calling is for us to be His disciples because He knows if we follow Him and His desires, we will, in turn, bring back many to Him in salvation.

Let me give you a personal example of how obedience to His leading brings abundant blessing: I was given the opportunity to be the number-two person at a large technology company for many years. I was part of three CEO transitions. Although I was never given the opportunity to move into the role, each time I remained a disciple of the new CEO, I chose to not complain that I did not get the number-one job.

As a matter of fact, I went the other direction. I prayed every night about being at peace with my personal and professional life. What came out

abound

of my prayers was an approach that led me to privately and publicly take on the responsibility to serve the new company leaders and help them become successful. Neither of them had been a CEO before, so focusing on their success was something that drove me. I did this without any regard to what it meant for me personally or professionally. There were times I quietly sat alone and prayed because it felt like I was doing a lot of the heavy lifting and the weight of the world was on my shoulders. It was during those prayers the Lord said to me, *“This is your path. This is My calling for you: to lead others and blessing will return.”* By following the Lord’s command, I was more than rewarded. The Lord has blessed me more than I could ever have imagined. Thank You, thank You, thank You, my guiding Light.

Some of those blessings were tangible, but the ones that meant the most were not. Actually, two of the most rewarding have been the encouraging words of others and the opportunity to see others experience life-changing events. Hearing a co-worker say, *“There’s something different about Carl and his leadership style. He’s one of the greatest leaders I have ever seen,”* felt like sweet whispers from the Lord and reminded me that I was merely

a reflection pointing to the greatest leader ever to grace the earth—Jesus. I also felt overwhelmingly privileged to play a small role in changing people’s lives for the better. How overjoyed my heart would be!

Lord, thank You for calling on me to follow You. You have taught me that to lead others, You must walk behind them. I am right behind You, Lord.

Self-Development

Day One

The Call

We have already established that we are called to a *Person*: Jesus Christ. If you believe John 3:16, you have been called in the truest form and, in turn, Romans 10:13 secures your call to Christ.

*For God so loved the world,
that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish,
but have eternal life.*

(John 3:16)

For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

(Romans 10:13)

Once this most important calling is established, you are called to a *Purpose*: to emulate the character of Jesus.

List the characteristics you are exhorted to emulate and practice from Galatians 5:22-26 and Philippians 4:8-9.

Not only will you want to display these attributes in yourself, but you must also watch for them in those called to join you. Philippians 4:9 has a very demonstrative action verb—*Practice*. In other words, perform these qualities repeatedly and habitually.

Calling, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action, especially when accompanied by conviction of divine influence; the vocation or profession in which one customarily engages.”

Read the following Scriptures and list who was called, who called them, what their calling was, and what their actions were.

Genesis 12:1-8

Nehemiah 2:11-18

1 Samuel 3:1-21

There is a leader, a follower, and a job to complete. The assignment given is not always a desirable one, but one that needs to be completed nonetheless. Like these men called to complete a task given to them by God, He also calls you to be fruitful. How well are you listening?

Have you heard from God the call He wants you to accomplish in this season? If yes, share that call with your group.

If you feel inadequate to fulfill your calling, read Acts 4:13 (NLT):

The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.

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Do you feel that God has called an ordinary person to fulfill a God-size job? What have you done recently to fulfill that job?

What does this Scripture say you can have when you spend time with the greatest leader, Jesus? Is this quality evident in your life? If not, what do you need to do to exemplify it?

Has your calling come to fruition yet? If not, how long have you been waiting?

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

Look up the following Scriptures. Record who waited and how long their wait was. This exercise should bring you comfort during your wait.

Acts 7:17-36

Genesis 40:14 - 41:1; 41:9-14

Luke 2:36-38

Purposeful Action

From today's reading, what area is God asking you to work on or practice?

Self-Development

Day Two

Timeline

Today, I would like for you to trace your life back to that moment you were first called into your particular season of leadership.

On the timeline, write the following milestones:

- **When you felt called into a ministry or vocation.** (*If you have not felt a particular calling yet, please still complete the following exercise with the experiences/work you have completed.*)
- **When your ministry or vocation to others began.**
- **The milestones along the way—good and bad.**
- **The different opportunities you had along the way through your ministry and vocation.**
- **When your attitude all changed from serving yourself to serving others.** (Write one word that only you know represents that time.)
- **Where you find yourself today.**

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP



When you have completed this exercise, under the timeline place the initials of those who have greatly affected your journey—both the good and bad influences.

Now, write the names of those who have poured into or influenced your life, and share with your team their qualities you would like to emulate.

Name

What they helped develop in me

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Take a moment and pray for them, thanking God for their influence on your life. Make it your goal to emulate their “pouring,” and bless others by exhibiting that same influence.

I am sure you can also think of some people who have not been a good influence in your life. (*I wouldn't dare ask you to write their names, but recall them now in your mind.*)

Yes, we can learn from all of them as well—about what not to be and how not to act. I know for myself that my interactions with difficult people have provided some of the best learning experiences and teachable moments in my life.

Take a moment and thank God for them too, including what you have learned from them.

Purposeful Action

From today's exercise, draw from your life experiences all of those people you are thankful for and write a prayer of gratitude.

Self-Development

Day Three

It's Okay To Be a Follower

Yes, whom you follow does matter. First, you want to be a follower of Jesus and display those characteristics we discussed in Day One. The only way to live these qualities out is to spend time with Him and seek His Word for direction.

Read the following Scriptures. List who the leader was and what the followers' responses to the task were.

Matthew 4:18-22

Luke 9:19-24

Once again, there is a leader, a follower, and a job to complete.

Follow Me . . . This was a call to service that illustrates the directness,

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solidity, and power of Christ's commands. Soon after He called His disciples, Jesus gave them the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), an extensive, in-depth teaching on life in the kingdom of God—what you might call basic principles of discipleship, or the Christian life.

Read Matthew 7:24-27. At the conclusion of these verses, what does Jesus emphasize regarding the profound importance of hearing and obeying this teaching?

How have you built your life on the solid rock?

When you build your life on the rock, what will that mean for those who follow you?

Following Jesus also involves following His example. Read John 13:14-17 and share what this Scripture represents.

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

The lesson Jesus was teaching involves the importance of serving one another in humility of heart and becoming servant leaders. This was a critically important lesson the disciples had been slow to learn, and washing their feet was an extraordinarily effective way of making the point. Sometimes, seeing a concrete example makes a greater impact on people than yet another statement of principle.

How have you seen servant leadership displayed?

What did you learn from it?

How can you tangibly display this kind of attitude to your team?

A servant-leadership approach is one that requires us to lay self aside and care for those we are leading first. It begs of us to lead by example, which means getting our hands dirty, jumping right in, and sharing in the load of those we lead. Our ability to act out of humility demands a certain level of emotional intelligence (EQ). EQ—as opposed to IQ, which is our intelligence quotient—means truly understanding how we come across to others as we lead them. The ability to know ourselves, as well as what others are perceiving about us, is paramount to moving

forward with a proposed plan or engaging with the varying personalities that compose a team. It's not a person's IQ that is most essential, but his or her EQ, because it will have the biggest impact on long-term effectiveness in a job—and success as a leader.⁷

If you are just starting out leading others, focus on developing your people skills. Emotional intelligence is the “something” in each of us that is a bit intangible. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results. Dr. Mick Ukleja, who has pioneered some great work on EQ, breaks down the areas of EQ to understand it better. Ukleja says emotional intelligence is made up of five skill sets.⁸

Review the following skill sets and answer the following questions.

1. **Self-perception** – *Self-perception is the way you view yourself.* As a leader, know your talents and gifts, and with confidence try to use them to their fullest.

Do you really know your strengths and weaknesses? How do you display them?

2. **Self-expression** – *Self-expression is the expression of your personality as you present a situation.* As a leader, be aware of the way you present your need to accomplish a task. In the twenty-first century, too many are good at just leaving comments, whereas God encourages conversation with Him through prayer and with others as well.

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

How effective are you when relating to others as a communicator?

Do others understand what you are trying to say to them when you present a task to them?

What characteristics make a person a good communicator?

Would you say that you are a good communicator? Why or why not?

- 3. Interpersonal dimension** – *The interpersonal dimension is the art of relaying information within relationships or communication between people.* As a leader, be clear about what you want to relay to your team and how you want them to perceive your request, decision, or challenge.

Do you make it a priority to interact with the people you work with? What does that interaction throughout your day look like?

What people skills are important to you?

- 4. Decision-making** – *Decision-making is the action or process of making decisions.* As a leader, there are decisions you will need to make prior to making a presentation to your team. Make sure you think the process through, and invite others to help with important decisions as needed.

What is your thought process as you make decisions for the good of the team?

How can you make decisions in a timelier manner, especially if you linger too long keeping things open?

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

5. **Stress management** – *Stress management consists of making changes to your life if you are in a constantly stressful situation.* As a leader, it is vital for your well-being to practice self-care through relaxation, prayer, and meditation, as well as exercise.

How do you act when you are under pressure?

When you're under pressure, what version of yourself do others see? Is it attractive or off-putting?

List ways you have learned to practice stress management.

Purposeful Action

Consider an act of service you can offer your team that, in turn, will show your appreciation.

Self-Development

Day Four

It Starts with You!

A call to purposeful leadership starts with you and flows down to those you lead.

After reading this chapter, where do you find yourself in these four areas listed? Explain how you are intentionally working through each of them.

Walking in a manner worthy of your calling

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord,
implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling
with which you have been called.*

(Ephesians 4:1)

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

Fulfilling the ministry set before you

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship,
do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

(2 Timothy 4:5)

Abound in the work of the Lord

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*

(1 Corinthians 15:58)

Live fruitfully

*Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus,
that as you received from us instruction
as to how you ought to walk and please God
(just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.
(1 Thessalonians 4:1)*

Depending on your team and work environment, the appropriateness of sharing about your personal life with others may vary. To what extent can your personal faith journey intersect with those of the members on your team?

Read Mark 4:20 again.

*“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil;
and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit,
thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”*

What do you need to do to live in the hundredfold (fullest potential)?

Which area (listed below) do you need to work on to help move you into your fullest potential?

- 1. Receive, believe, achieve**
- 2. Move beyond the past**
- 3. Goal-setter, goal-keeper**
- 4. Know your *why***
- 5. Trust God with the outcome**
- 6. Make the move**

What course of action will you implement to make it a reality in your life?

Purposeful Action

Commit to a specific area that will move you from the thirty-fold mentality to a hundred-fold opportunity.

Self-Development

Day Five

Take Action!

At the end of each chapter, Day Five will be a “take action day” for you and possibly your team, if applicable.

Strategic planning is vital for you and your team. It will enable you to move forward personally and collectively. It is an organization’s process of defining your strategy or direction while making decisions on allocating resources to pursue that strategy.

First, determine your personal mission and vision, and then see how it fits into your ministry or organization’s mission and vision.

A mission statement describes what a person or company wants to do now.

A vision statement outlines what a person or company wants to be in the future.⁹

The mission is God’s call on your life. You know what your mission is when you can complete this statement, “*God called me to:* _____.”

Vision is your unique take on that mission. You can state your vision by completing the statement, “*When the mission is complete, it will look like this:* _____.”

A call to purposeful servant LEADERSHIP

How do your personal and organizational mission and vision align? If they don't align, what will you need to do to make the vision clearer?

What are your personal goals?

What are your team goals?

How can you implement the qualities from this chapter to move your vision, mission, and goals forward?